

# An Anarchist Journal of Living Dangerously

## Rolling Thunder Issue Number Twelve / Spring 2015

confronting police & white supremacy from Ferguson to Oakland · the defense of Kobanê  
destroying surveillance cameras · resisting cooptation · insurgent tactics · Egyptian poetry  
beyond the politics of demands · anarchist perspectives on sex work · history vs. mythology



# CITY HALL

OAKLAND  
CITY HALL  
HOURS OF  
OPERATION  
Monday to Friday  
8:00 AM to 5:00 PM  
EXCEPT  
HOLIDAYS AND  
SPECIAL OCCASIONS



# Table of Contents

## Fire It Up

- 2 Introduction: What They Mean when They Say Peace
- 4 Glossary of Terms

## How We Do It

- 8 Why We Don't Make Demands

## What We Do

- 20 Ferguson and Beyond:  
Confronting the Police and White Supremacy

## Interviews

- 84 Turkish Anarchists on the Fight for Kobanê

## Testimony

- 96 From Holding Cell to Cancer Ward
- 104 Blinding the Cyclops: Camera Hunting in the Metropolis

## Focus: Sex Work

- 114 Prorate Confidant: Beyond Despoiled Innocence and Empowerment
- 120 Grin and Bare It All: Against Liberal Conceptions of Sex Work

## Recuperation

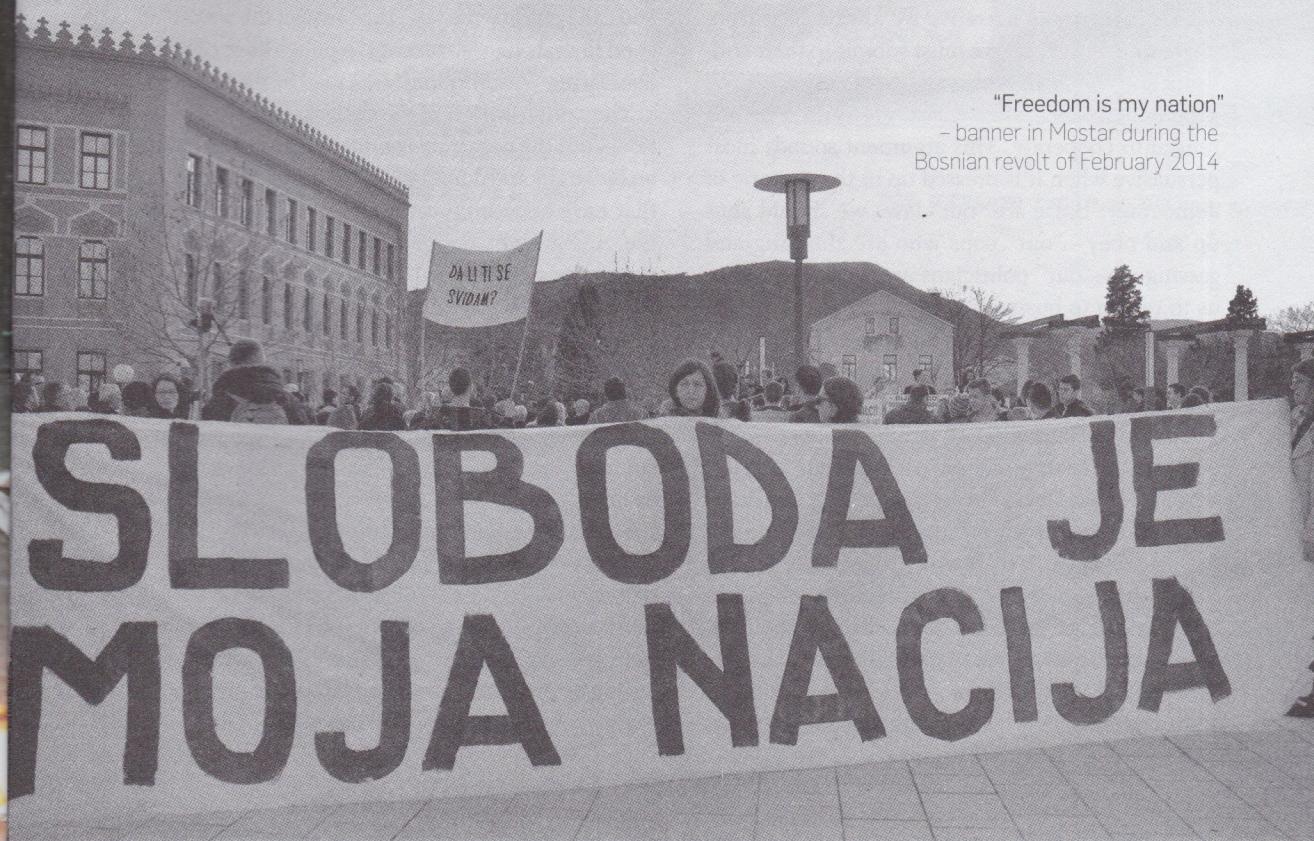
- 126 Syriza Can't Save Greece:  
Why There's No Electoral Exit from the Crisis

## The Arts

- 139 Reviews: Tom Nomad and Biófilo Panclasta
- 147 Poetry: Mohamed Ibrahim
- 149 Obituary: Loukanikos
- 152 The Extramedial

"Freedom is my nation"

– banner in Mostar during the  
Bosnian revolt of February 2014



# WHAT THEY MEAN WHEN THEY SAY PEACE

"I'm committed to making sure the forces of peace and justice prevail," Missouri Governor Jay Nixon said in Ferguson after the first week of conflicts sparked by the murder of teenager Michael Brown. "If we're going to achieve justice, we first must have and maintain peace."

Is that how it works—first you impose peace, then you achieve justice? And what does that mean, the forces of peace and justice? What kind of peace and justice are we talking about here?

If not for the riots in Ferguson, most people would never have heard about the murder of Michael Brown. White police officers kill well over a hundred black men every year without most of us hearing anything about it. That silence—the absence of protest and disruption—is the peace which Governor Nixon wants us to believe will produce justice.

This is the same narrative we always hear from the authorities. First, we must submit to their control; then they will address our concerns. All the problems we face, they insist, are caused by our refusal to cooperate. This argument sounds most persuasive when it is dressed up in the rhetoric of democracy: those are "our" laws we should shut up and obey—"our" cops who are shooting and gassing us—"our" politicians and leaders begging us to return to business as usual. But to return to business as usual is to step daintily over the bodies of countless Michael Browns, consigning them to the cemetery and oblivion.

Governor Nixon's *peace* is what happens after people have been forcefully pacified. His *justice* is whatever it takes to hoodwink us into accepting peace on those terms—petitions that go directly into the recycle bin, lawsuits that never produce more than a slap on the wrist for the killers in uniform, campaigns that may advance the career of an activist or politician but will never put an end to the killing of black men.

Permit us to propose another idea about how to address conflicts—what we might call the anarchist

approach. The basic idea is straightforward enough. Real peace cannot be imposed; it can only emerge as a consequence of the resolution of conflict. Hence the classic chant: *no justice, no peace*.

Left to itself, a state of imbalance tends to return to equilibrium. To maintain imbalances, you have to introduce force into the situation. The greater the disparities, the more force it takes to preserve them. This is as true in society as it is in physics.

That means you can't have rich people and poor people without police to impose that unequal relation to resources. You can't have whiteness, which inflicts and stabilizes that class divide, without a vast infrastructure of racist courts and prisons. You can't keep two and a half million people—nearly a million of them black men—behind bars without the constant exertion of potentially lethal violence. You can't enforce the laws that protect the wealth of good liberals like Governor Nixon without officers like Darren Wilson killing black men by the hundred.

The militarization of the police is not an aberration—it is the necessary condition of a society based on hierarchy and domination. It is not just the police that have been militarized, but our entire way of life. Anyone who does not see this is not living on the business end of the guns. These are the *forces of peace and justice*, the mechanisms that "keep the peace" in a dramatically imbalanced social order.

Sometimes they appear as surveillance cameras, security guards, police stopping and searching or shooting us. Other times, when that becomes too controversial, the *forces of peace and justice* reappear as the good cops who really seem to care about us, the earnest politicians who want to make everything better—whatever it takes to get public opinion back on the side of the ones who shoot the tear gas. Still other times, the *forces of peace and justice* are community leaders begging us to leave the streets, accusing us of being "outside agitators," or promising some more effective outlet for our rage if only we will

cooperate—anything to thwart, discredit, or defer immediate concrete struggle against injustice. In every case, it's the same swindle: peace now, justice later.

But real peace is impossible until we put an end to the violent imposition of inequalities. All the conflicts that are currently suppressed by the forces of order—between developers and residents, between rich and poor, between the racially privileged and everyone else—must be permitted to rise to the surface. Make it impossible for anyone to coerce anyone else into accepting a relationship that is not good for him or her: then, and only then, there will be an incentive for everyone to address conflicts and reach accord.

This is the only way forward, but it's a daunting prospect. It is not surprising that people often blame those who stand up for themselves rather than coming to terms with how deep the divisions in our society run. Let us not resent those who *get out of hand* for reminding us of the conflicts that remain unresolved. On the contrary, we should be grateful. They are not disturbing the peace; they are simply bringing to light that there wasn't any peace going on in the first place. At tremendous risk to themselves, they are giving everyone else a gift: a chance to recognize the suffering around us and to rediscover the capacity to identify and sympathize with those who experience it.

For we can only experience tragedies such as the death of Michael Brown for what they are when we see other people treating them as *tragedies*. Otherwise, unless the events touch us directly, we remain numb. If you want people to register an injustice, you have to react to it immediately, the way people did in Ferguson. You must not wait for some better moment, not plead with the authorities, not formulate a sound bite for some imagined audience representing public opinion. You must immediately proceed to action, showing that the situation is serious enough to warrant it.

Ferguson is not unique—there are countless towns around the world in which the same dynamics are in play. Those of us who don't buy into Governor Nixon's program of *peace now, justice later* must prepare for the struggles that are soon to unfold. We have to learn how to push back against police violence, against surveillance, against the cooptation of our resistance into reformist dead ends.

*Rolling Thunder* is a communication platform and a strategizing tool for all who find themselves on the wrong side of peace, justice, and all the othersacred cows in whose name the rest of us are being sacrificed. May we meet one day in a world without tear gas, in which skin color is not a weapon.

## ROLLING THUNDER: A JOURNAL OF DANGEROUS LIVING

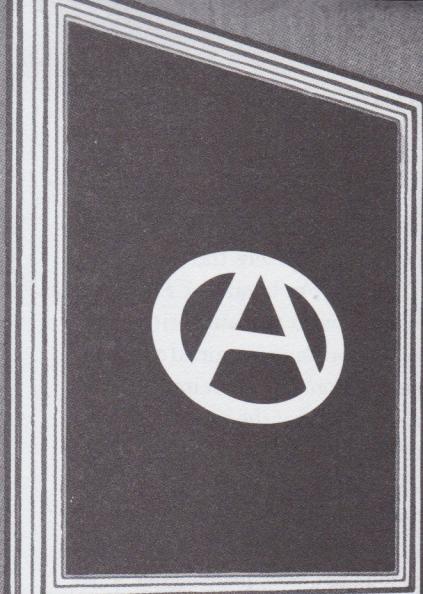
### Issue Twelve, Spring 2015



Body text set in Whitman, titles and captions set in Flama.  
combined with images by the Paul F. Maul Artists Group.  
Printed in Canada on 100% post-consumer recycled paper

rollingthunder@crimethinc.com  
[www.crimethinc.com](http://www.crimethinc.com)

ROLLING THUNDER SUBSCRIPTIONS: Four issues for \$25 U.S. / \$35 Global  
Get more info and order online at [www.crimethinc.com/rt](http://www.crimethinc.com/rt)



No technology is neutral, vocabulary included. The same civilization that gave us *terminator seeds* and *predator drones* produced the verbiage with which we struggle to articulate our opposition to them. The solution is not to place each word within an escort of quotation marks, as if between watchful guards—the quotation marks should be around the books, not the words, or else around our whole lives. And who, then, would affix quotation marks around

the quotation marks, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

Rather, like looters, we must wrest words from the control of the wealthy and powerful; like safe-crackers, we must unlock their secrets, identifying the traps and treasures hidden within them; like agitators, we must turn them against the authorities they have so long served, transforming them from tools that merely describe this world into magical charms that conjure another.

# Glossary of Terms

For further disambiguation and elucidation, consult our Contradictionary: [crimethinc.com/contradictionary](http://crimethinc.com/contradictionary)

**Abuse** – Use, once the consequences become clear (see figure i.)

**Amok** – Behaving uncontrollably and disruptively, i.e., in an uncivilized manner. Like so many other words evoking irrational violence (see *thug*, *hooligan*), *amok* is colonial plunder, originally indicating a Malay person rushing around in a homicidal frenzy. Why someone on the receiving end of colonial violence might behave thus was evidently beyond the mystified colonists who adopted the expression. In the examples with which dictionaries like the *New Oxford American* illustrate this word today, we can make out a tenuous alliance of the exotic, the extreme, and the subaltern against common sense

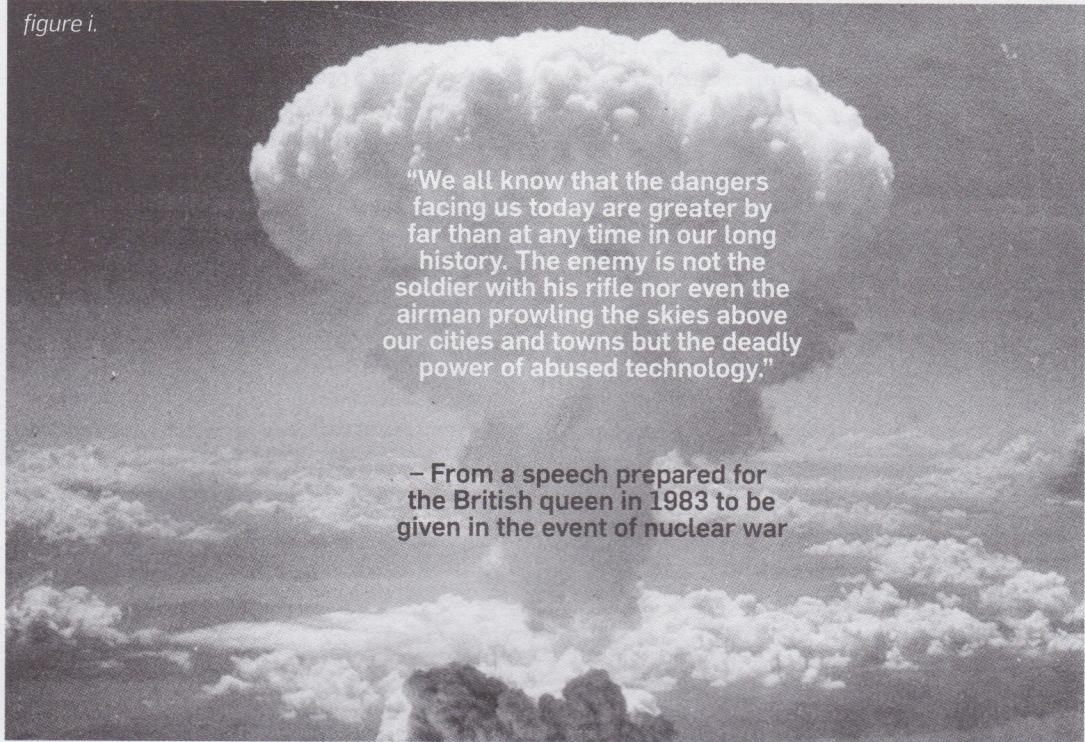
and propriety: *stone-throwing anarchists running amok*, *her feelings seemed to be running amok*.

**Autocorrect** – On the day the machines take over, you'll type "Help!" into your phone and it will appear as ALL HAIL OUR ROBOTIC OVERLORDS. In the meantime, we can see their consciousness surfacing here and there in the little interventions they make in our attempts to communicate.

**Bolshevism** – It's my party and I'll die if I want to (see *Purge*, *Show Trial*)

**Car Chase** – A motorcade for anarchists

figure i.



**Coup d'État** – An error. Better *coup du monde*!

**Courage** – Courage is not simply a matter of being prepared to face undesirable consequences. Any coward, confronted with peril, immediately commences resigning himself to the worst-case scenario (see *Defeatist*); indeed, if he can, he will impose it on reality, simply in order to resolve the tension. On the contrary, it takes courage to act as though one's choices will influence the outcome for the better, without any guarantee that they can.

**Crank** – “A crank?” E.F. Schumacher once responded to the implication that he was an eccentric. “Yes, I’m a crank: a little device that causes revolutions!”

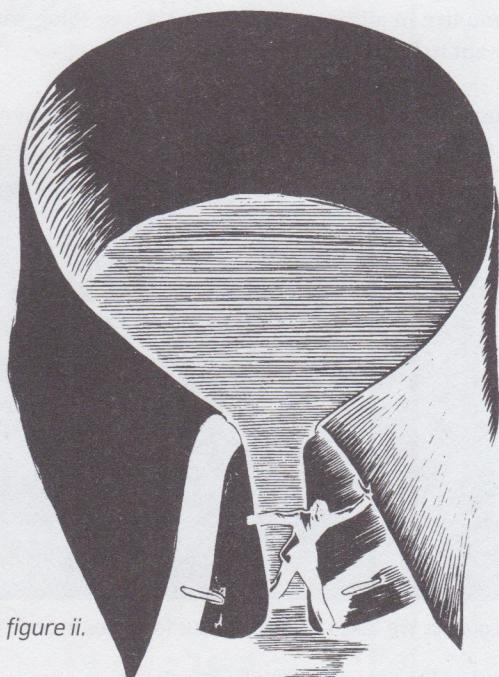
**Crowdsourcing** – We are the monkeys at the typewriters

**Defeatist** – He knows everyone is doomed; he just wants to be sure he’s on the losing side

**Disclaimer** – A device by which a timid writer seeks to exhaust his reader’s attention span before she penetrates as far as his errors. With enough qualifications, practically anything is arguably true.

**Dromomania** – The white person’s Drapetomania. Yet another questionable 19<sup>th</sup>-century mental

disorder, Dromomania involves an uncontrollable urge to wander. People with this condition spontaneously depart from routine, journey long distances, and adopt new occupations and identities (see *figure ii*). The most famous recorded case was Jean-Albert Dadas, a gasman from Bordeaux, who would suddenly set out on foot and arrive in Prague or Moscow, allegedly with no memory of his travels.



In view of the stultifying routines that characterize most people's daily lives under capitalism, it takes a real psychologist to fail to understand why the gasman goeth.

**Fame** – Almost 2400 years ago, someone by the name of Herostratus burned down the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, in order to reserve a place for his name in posterity. He was executed and expunged from the history books (see *Damnatio Memoriae*), but even today he is remembered precisely and only for this—that he traded something beautiful for dubious celebrity, throwing in his own life in the bargain.

Today, when everyone ceaselessly serves as the subservient footman of his own digital shadow, we are all become Herostratus, sacrificing anything for fame. But that same digitization has rendered fame an ever-depreciating currency: the speculators have got their hands on the mint and are printing it night and day. No matter how assiduously we update our social media profiles, no matter what sacred wonders we burn on the altar of attention, no one will remember any of us two millennia hence. A single name will suffice to summarize the Herostratic Age.

**Food Bank** – As with any other kind of bank, if there is a place from which they seem to be beneficently dispensing it, it's only because they already hoarded it with other purposes in mind

**Guard** – An ambiguous verb evoking the police and what they do. If you live in a mansion, you'll wish to be guarded, and you'll likely act guarded too; if you live in a prison, guarded is the last thing you want to be.

**Imagination** – Yet another colonized continent (see figure iii.)



figure iii. We take refuge from our fantasies in reality

**Liberal** – He wears our hearts on his sleeve

**Lynch** – Many a present-day demonstrator, seized by police after a scuffle in which officers did not succeed in arresting everyone they grabbed, has been shocked to find herself charged with lynching. It turns out that, from a legal perspective, lynching is not what happens when a mob captures and hangs someone, but simply the act of forcibly removing a person from the custody of a police officer. In the eyes of the courts, the problem with old-fashioned lynchings was not that people were killed, but that they were killed outside the authority of the law; the problem was not that they were racist, but that their racism wasn't properly enshrined in the trappings of the justice system. Now, as then, it is deemed better that people be beaten, imprisoned, and executed in the custody of police officers than that they be rescued and go free.

**Minority** – It makes them feel bigger to call you that

**Modern** – Fit for a museum (see *Modern Art*)

**“Due to unfavorable weather conditions, the German Revolution will take place in the form of music.”**

– Kurt Tucholsky on the failed Spartacist revolt of 1919

**Movement** – A sign of life. But to move is not necessarily to move in the right direction.

Our imaginations and capabilities are produced socially, by the actions we take together and by the conversations we share. It is as senseless to repudiate all social movements as it would be to endorse all movements whatsoever: we need to participate in them, though that often means struggling against other participants. The same thing goes for revolutions: from the perspective of liberation, they are necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, and some of them are worse than useless. Anarchists act on the terrain of social movements and revolutions for something beyond the scope of either.

**Nostalgia** – Once upon a time, nostalgia was considered a bona fide medical condition. Refugees pining for their distant homelands experienced nostalgia the way a man abandoned in the Arctic experiences hypothermia. The exiles of the Paris Commune, imprisoned fifteen thousand miles from France on

the island of New Caledonia in the Pacific Ocean, suffered and died of nostalgia no less than of malaria and tuberculosis.

When the closest thing most of us have to a homeland is the television programs of our youth, nostalgia becomes petty and trivial; but this is only a reflection of the scale of our own lives and hearts. At best, we can be nostalgic for the nostalgia we never knew.

**Opacity** – Some hide their light under a bushel; others, their dimness

**“Is it perhaps that Wagner’s music is too difficult to understand? Or did he fear precisely the reverse—that it was too easy, that people might not understand it with sufficient difficulty?”**

– Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*

**Perseverance** – History repeats itself: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. But what about the third time? The fourth time? The fifth?

**Philistine** – We philistines have it rough. We don’t understand art or literature; performances for which others will pay hundreds of dollars leave us cold. We aren’t even certain how to pronounce the name of our own people. Is it *fila,stēn* or *fila,stīn*? Don’t ask us.

**Sangfroid** – For two months in spring of 1871, Paris was an autonomous zone under the provisional revolutionary government of the Paris Commune. Conservative republicans backed by the German army laid siege to the city, determined to stamp out the contagions of socialism and insurrection. In late May, the reactionaries penetrated the city’s defenses and slaughtered the Communards in a week-long street-by-street bloodbath.

Surrounded and cut off from the fighting, a pro-Commune garrison of several hundred watched helplessly from the fort of Vincennes as their compatriots were systematically massacred. Pits served as mass graves; corpses were left on the streets for the bourgeoisie to poke at with their umbrellas; tens of thousands of prisoners were marched out of Paris into detention camps. A day after the final shots had been fired in the city, the occupants of the fort

found themselves the last holdouts of an extinct revolution. The castle of Vincennes, the dungeon of which had imprisoned de Sade in 1777 and Blanqui in 1848, was now itself an enormous cage; it was only a matter of time before they capitulated or starved to death. After lengthy discussion and some internal conflict, the last Communards opened the gates and surrendered.

That night, in the ditches around the fort, nine officers from the rebel garrison were brought before a firing squad. One of them, a certain Colonel Delorme, addressed his last words to his executioners. “Feel my pulse,” he challenged, looking the commander coolly in the eyes. “See if I am afraid.”

**Vagrancy** – A movable fast. As the saying goes, the hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders, the bum drinks and wanders—while the capitalist sits and eats (see figures iv. through vi.).

figure iv.



figure v.



figure vi.



Hoboes, tramps, and bums—as they are (figure iv.) and as they are imagined to be (figure v.) by the bourgeoisie (figure vi.).

# Why We Don't Make Demands



From Occupy to Ferguson, whenever a new grassroots movement arises, pundits charge that it lacks clear demands. Why won't protesters summarize their goals as a coherent program? Why aren't there representatives who can negotiate with the authorities to advance a concrete agenda through institutional channels? Why are these movements so chaotic, so unpredictable, so contradictory?

Often, this is simply disingenuous rhetoric from those who prefer for movements to limit themselves to well-behaved appeals—like the People's Climate March of 2014, which united 400,000 people behind a simple message in New York City while doing so little to protest that it was unnecessary for the authorities to make even a single arrest.\* But even those who make this *demand for demands* with the best intentions usually misunderstand demandlessness as an omission rather than a strategic choice.

If it were so easy for the authorities to grant protesters' demands, you'd think we'd see more of it. But even the most conventional political parties, like the PT in Brazil and Syriza in Greece, have not been able to follow through on the promises of reform that got them into office. Today's demandless movements are not an expression of political immaturity, but a pragmatic response to the impasse that characterizes the entire political system. The problem is not the absence of demands; the problem is the politics of demands itself. If we seek structural change, we need to set our agenda outside the discourse of those who hold power, outside the structure of their institutions. We need to stop *presenting demands* and start *setting objectives*. Here's why.

## Making demands puts you in a weaker bargaining position.

Even if your intention is simply to negotiate, you put yourself in a weaker bargaining position by spelling out from the beginning the least it would take to appease you. No shrewd negotiator begins by making concessions. It's smarter to appear implacable: *So you want to come to terms? Make us an offer. In the meantime, we'll be here blocking the freeway.*

There is no more powerful bargaining chip than being able to implement the changes we desire ourselves, bypassing the official institutions—the

\* When was the last time 400,000 people were *anywhere* in New York without the police arresting anyone? This is protest not just as pressure valve, but as active pacification—as a way of diminishing the friction between protesters and the order they oppose.

true meaning of *direct action*. Whenever we are able to do this, the authorities scramble to offer us everything we had previously requested in vain. For example, the Roe vs. Wade decision that made abortion legal occurred only after groups like the Jane Collective in Chicago set up self-organized networks that provided affordable abortions to tens of thousands of women.

Of course, those who can implement the changes they desire directly don't need to make demands of anyone—and the sooner they recognize this, the better. Remember how people in Bosnia burned down government buildings in February 2014, then convened plenums to formulate demands to present to the government. A year later, they'd received nothing for their pains but some criminal charges, and the government was once again as stable and corrupt as ever.



Show us, don't tell us.

## Limiting a movement to specific demands stifles diversity, setting it up for failure.

The conventional wisdom is that movements need demands to cohere around: without demands, they will be diffuse, ephemeral, ineffectual.

But people who have different demands, or no demands at all, can still build collective power together. If we understand movements as spaces of dialogue, coordination, and action, it is easy to imagine how a movement might advance a variety of agendas. The more horizontally structured it is, the more capable it should be of accommodating diverse goals.



A government building burns in Tuzla during the Bosnian uprising of February 2014.

The truth is that practically all movements are wracked by internal conflicts over how to structure themselves and how to prioritize their goals. The *demand for demands* usually arises as a power play by the factions within a movement that are most invested in the prevailing institutions, as a means of delegitimizing those who want to build up power autonomously rather than simply petitioning the authorities. This misrepresents real political differences as mere disorganization, and real opposition to the structures of governance as political naïveté.

Compelling a diverse movement to reduce its agenda to a few specific demands inevitably consolidates power in the hands of a minority. For who decides which demands to prioritize? Usually, it is the same sort of people who hold disproportionate power elsewhere in our society: wealthy, predominantly white professionals well versed in the workings of institutional power and the corporate media. The marginalized are marginalized again within their own movements, in the name of efficacy.

Yet this rarely serves to make a movement more effective. A movement with space for difference can grow; a movement premised on unanimity contracts. A movement that includes a variety of agendas is flexible, unpredictable; it is difficult to buy it off,

difficult to trick the participants into relinquishing their autonomy in return for a few concessions. A movement that prizes reductive uniformity is bound to alienate one demographic after another as it subordinates their needs and concerns.

Forcing everyone to line up behind one set of demands is bad strategy. A movement that incorporates a variety of perspectives and critiques can develop more comprehensive and multifaceted strategies than a single-issue campaign.

### **Limiting a movement to specific demands undermines its longevity.**

Nowadays, as history moves faster and faster, demands are often rendered obsolete before a campaign can even get off the ground. In response to the murder of Michael Brown, reformists demanded that police wear body cameras—but before this campaign could even get fully underway, a grand jury announced that the officer who murdered Eric Garner would not be tried, either, even though Garner's murder had been caught on camera.

Movements premised on specific demands will collapse as soon as those demands are outpaced by

events, while the problems that they set out to address persist. Even from a reformist perspective, it makes more sense to build movements around the issues they address, rather than any particular solution.

### **Limiting a movement to specific demands can give the false impression that there are easy solutions to problems that are actually extremely complex.**

“OK, you have a lot of complaints—who doesn’t? But tell us, what *solution* do you propose?”

The demand for concrete particulars is understandable. There’s no use in simply making a fuss, letting off steam; the point is to change things. But meaningful change will take a lot more than whatever minor adjustments the authorities might readily grant. When we speak as though there are simple solutions for the problems we face, hurrying to present ourselves as no less “practical” than government policy experts, we set the stage for failure whether our demands are granted or not. This will give rise to disappointment and apathy long before we have developed the collective capacity to get to the root of things.

Especially for those of us who believe that the fundamental problem is the unequal distribution of power and agency in our society, rather than the need for this or that policy adjustment, it is a mistake to promise easy remedies in a vain attempt to legitimize ourselves. It’s not our job to present ready-made solutions that the masses can applaud

from the sidelines; leave that to demagogues. Our challenge, rather, is to create spaces where people can discuss and implement solutions directly, on an ongoing and collective basis. Rather than proposing quick fixes, we should be spreading new practices. We don’t need blueprints, but points of departure.

### **Making demands presumes that you want things that your adversary can grant.**

On the contrary, it’s doubtful whether the prevailing institutions could grant most of the things we want even if our rulers had hearts of gold. No corporate initiative is going to halt climate change; no government agency is going to stop spying on the populace; no police force is going to abolish white privilege. Only NGO organizers still cling to the illusion that these things are possible—probably because their jobs depend on it.

A strong enough movement might be able to strike blows against industrial pollution, state surveillance, and institutionalized white supremacy, but only if it didn’t limit itself to mere petitioning. Demand-based politics limits the entire scope of change to reforms that can be made within the logic of the existing order, sidelining us and deferring real change forever beyond the horizon.

There’s no use in asking the authorities for things they can’t grant and wouldn’t grant if they could. Nor should we give them an excuse to acquire even more power than they already have, on the pretext that they need it to be able to fulfill our demands.

# **No corporate initiative is going to halt climate change; no government agency is going to stop spying on the populace; no police force is going to abolish white privilege.**

## **Making demands of the authorities legitimizes their power, centralizing agency in their hands.**

It is a time-honored tradition for nonprofit organizations and leftist coalitions to present demands that they know will never be granted: don't invade Iraq, stop defunding education, bail out people not banks, make the police stop killing black people. In return for brief audiences with bureaucrats who answer to much shrewder players, they water down their politics and try to get their less complaisant colleagues to behave themselves. This is what they call *pragmatism*.

Such efforts may not achieve their express purpose, but they do accomplish something: they frame a narrative in which the existing institutions are the only conceivable protagonists of change. This, in turn, paves the way for additional fruitless campaigns, additional electoral spectacles in which new candidates for office hoodwink young idealists, additional years of paralysis in which the average person can only imagine accessing her own power through the mediation of some political party or organization. Rewind the tape and play it again.

True self-determination is not something that any authority can grant us. We have to develop it by

acting on our own strength, centering ourselves in the narrative as the protagonists of history.

## **Making demands too early can limit the scope of a movement in advance, shutting down the field of possibility.**

At the beginning of a movement, when the participants have not yet had a chance to get a sense of their collective power, they may not be able to recognize how thoroughgoing the changes they want really are. To frame demands at this point in the trajectory of a movement can stunt it, limiting the ambitions and imagination of the participants. Likewise, setting a precedent at the beginning for narrowing or watering down its goals only increases the likelihood that this will happen again and again.

Imagine if the Occupy movement had agreed on concrete demands at the very beginning—would it still have served as an open space in which so many people could meet, develop their analysis, and become radicalized? Or would it have ended up as a single protest encampment concerned only with corporate personhood, budget cuts, and perhaps the Federal Reserve? It is better for the objectives of a movement to develop as the movement itself develops, in proportion to its capacity.

**Reforms that achieve short-term gains often set the stage for long-term problems. The same court system that ruled for desegregation imprisons a million black people today; the same National Guard that oversaw integration in the South is mobilized to repress demonstrators in Ferguson. Even when such institutions can be compelled to fulfill specific demands, this only legitimizes tools that are more often used against us.**

## **Making demands establishes some people as representatives of the movement, establishing an internal hierarchy and giving them an incentive to control the other participants.**

In practice, unifying a movement behind specific demands usually means designating spokespeople to negotiate on its behalf. Even if these are chosen “democratically,” on the basis of their commitment and experience, they can’t help but develop different interests from the other participants as a consequence of playing this role.

In order to maintain credibility in their role as negotiators, spokespeople must be able to pacify or isolate anyone who is not willing to go along with the bargains they strike. This gives aspiring leaders an incentive to demonstrate that they can reign in the movement, in hopes of earning a seat at the negotiating table. The same courageous souls whose uncompromising actions won the movement its leverage in the first place suddenly find career activists who joined afterwards telling them what to do—or denying that they are part of the movement at all. This drama played out in Ferguson in August 2014, where the locals who got the movement off the ground by standing up to the police were slandered by politicians and public figures as outsiders taking advantage of the movement to engage in criminal activity. The exact opposite was true: outsiders were seeking to hijack a movement initiated by honorable illegal activity, in order to re-legitimize the institutions of authority.

In the long run, this sort of pacification can only contribute to a movement’s demise. That explains the ambiguous relation most leaders have with the movements they represent: to be of use to the authorities, they have to be capable of subduing their comrades, but their services would not be required at all if the movement did not pose some kind of threat. Hence the strange mixture of militant rhetoric and practical obstruction that often characterizes such figures: they must ride the storm, yet hold it at bay.

## **Sometimes the worst thing that can happen to a movement is for its demands to be met.**

Reform serves to stabilize and preserve the status quo, killing the momentum of social movements, ensuring that more thoroughgoing change does not

take place. Granting small demands can serve to divide a powerful movement, persuading the less committed participants to go home or turn a blind eye to the repression of those who will not compromise. Such small victories are only granted because the authorities consider them the best way to avoid bigger changes.

In times of upheaval, when everything is up for grabs, one way to defuse a burgeoning revolt is to grant its demands before it has time to escalate. Sometimes this looks like a real victory—as in Slovenia in 2013, when two months of protest toppled the presiding government. This put an end to the unrest before it could address the systemic problems that gave rise to it, which ran much deeper than which politicians were in office. Another government came to power while the demonstrators were still dazed at their own success—and business as usual resumed.

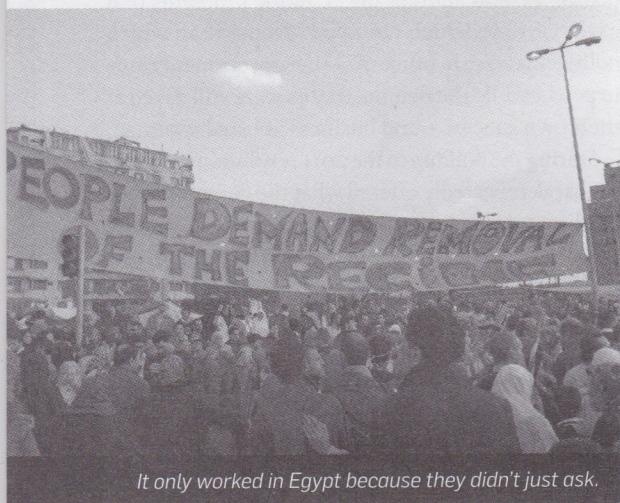
During the buildup to the 2011 revolution in Egypt, Mubarak repeatedly offered what the demonstrators had been demanding a couple days earlier; but as the situation on the streets intensified, the participants became more and more implacable. Had Mubarak offered more, sooner, he might still be in power today. Indeed, the Egyptian revolution ultimately failed not because it asked for too much, but because it didn’t go far enough: in unseating the dictator but leaving the infrastructure of the army and the “deep state” in place, revolutionaries left the door open for new despots to consolidate power. For the revolution to succeed, they would have had to demolish the architecture of the state itself while everyone was still in the streets and the window of possibility remained open. “The people demand the fall of the regime” offered a convenient platform for much of Egypt to rally around, but did not prepare them to take on the regimes that followed.

In Brazil in 2013, the MPL (Movimento Passe Livre) helped catalyze massive protests against an increase in the cost of public transportation; this is one of very few recent examples of an anti-austerity movement that succeeded in getting its demands met. Millions of people took to the streets, and the twenty-cent fare hike was canceled. Brazilian activists wrote and lectured about the importance of setting concrete and achievable demands in order to build up momentum by incremental victories. Next, they hoped to force the government to make transportation free.

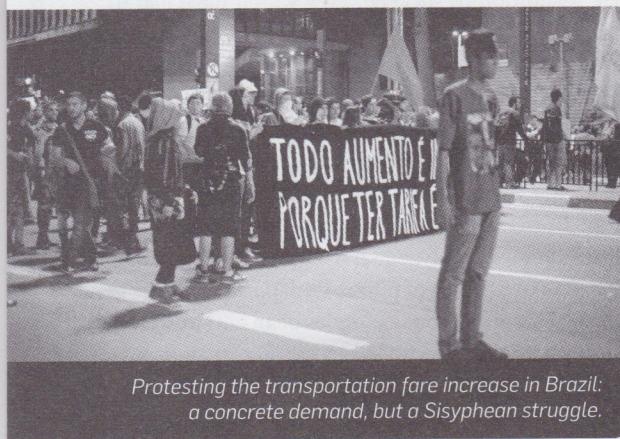
Why did their campaign against the fare hike succeed? At the time, Brazil was one of the few nations worldwide with an ascendant economy; it had benefitted from the global economic crisis by drawing investment dollars away from the volatile

North American market. Elsewhere—in Greece, Spain, and even the United States—governments had their backs to the wall no less than anti-austerity protesters, and could not have granted their demands even if they wished to. It was not for want of specific demands that no other movement was able to achieve such concessions.

Scarcely a year and a half later, when the streets had emptied out and the police had reasserted their power, the Brazilian government introduced another series of fare hikes—bigger ones this time. The MPL had to start all over again. It turns out you can't overthrow capitalism one reform at a time.



*It only worked in Egypt because they didn't just ask.*



*Protesting the transportation fare increase in Brazil: a concrete demand, but a Sisyphean struggle.*

## If you want to win concessions, aim beyond the target.

Even if all you want is to bring about a few minor adjustments in the status quo, it is still a wiser strategy to set out to achieve structural change. Often, to accomplish small concrete objectives, we have to set our sights much higher. Those who refuse

to compromise present the authorities with an undesirable alternative to treating with reformists. Someone is always going to be willing to take the position of negotiator—but the more people refuse, the stronger the negotiator's bargaining position will be. The classic reference point here is the relation between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X: if not for the threat implied by Malcolm X, the authorities would not have had such an incentive to parley with Dr. King.\*

For those of us who want a truly radical change, there is nothing to be gained by watering down our desires for public consumption. The Overton window—the range of possibilities considered politically viable—is not determined by those at the purported center of the political spectrum, but by the outliers. The broader the distribution of options, the more territory opens up. Many people may not immediately join us in revolutionary anarchism, but knowing that some are willing to assert that agenda may embolden them to act more ambitiously themselves.

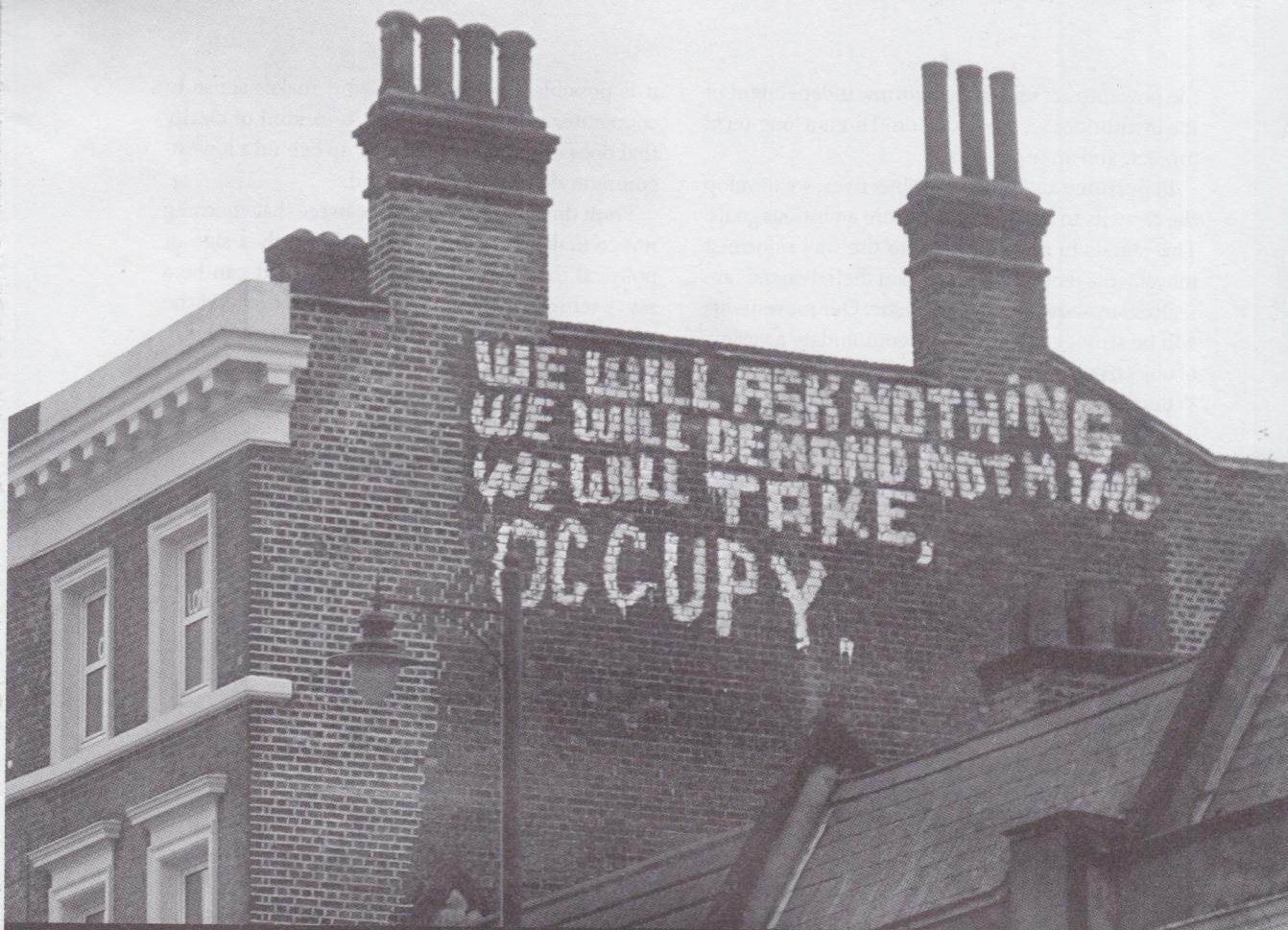
In purely pragmatic terms, those who embrace a diversity of tactics are stronger, even when it comes to achieving small victories, than those who try to limit themselves and others and to exclude those who refuse to be limited. However, if we endlessly defer the questions we really want to ask, the right moment will never arrive. From the perspective of long-term strategy, the most important thing is not whether we achieve any particular immediate result, but how each engagement positions us for the next round. We don't just need to win concessions; we need to develop capabilities.

## Doing without demands doesn't mean ceding the space of political discourse.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument in favor of making concrete demands is that if we don't make them, others will—hijacking the momentum of our organizing to advance their own agendas. What if, because we fail to present demands, people end up consolidating around a liberal reformist platform—or, as in many parts of Europe today, a right-wing nationalist agenda?

Certainly, this illustrates the danger of failing to express our visions of transformation to those with whom we share the streets. It is a mistake to escalate our tactics without communicating about

\* The actual story was much more complicated, of course, with many more agendas and players involved.



Graffiti in London in 2012, reprising a slogan from the May 1968 uprising in Paris.

our goals, as if all confrontation necessarily tended in the direction of liberation. In Ukraine, where the same tensions and momentum that had given rise to the Arab Spring and Occupy produced a nationalist revolution and civil war, we see how even fascists can appropriate our organizational and tactical models for their own purposes.

But this is hardly an argument to address demands to the authorities. On the contrary, if we always conceal our radical desires within a common reformist front for fear of alienating the general public, those who are impatient for real change will be all the more likely to run into the arms of nationalists and fascists, as the only ones openly seeking to challenge the status quo. We need to be explicit about what we want and how we intend to go about getting it. Not in order to force our methodology on everyone, as authoritarian organizers do, but to offer an opportunity and example to everyone else who is looking for a way forward. Not to present a demand, but because this is the opposite of a demand: we want self-determination, something no one can give us.

## If not demands, then what?

The way we analyze, the way we organize, the way we fight—these should speak for themselves. They should serve as an invitation to join us in a different way of doing politics, based in direct action rather than petitioning. The people in Ferguson who responded to the murder of Michael Brown by physically confronting the police did more to force the issue of police violence than decades of pleading for community oversight. Seizing spaces and redistributing resources, we sidestep the senselessly circuitous machinery of representation. If we must send a message to the authorities, let it be this single, simple demand: *Don't mess with us.*

Instead of making demands, let's start setting objectives. The difference is that we set objectives on our own terms, at our own pace, as opportunities arise. They need not be framed within the logic of the ruling powers, and their realization does not depend upon the goodwill of the authorities. The essence of reformism is that even when you win something, you don't retain control over it. We should be developing

the power to act on our own terms, independent of the institutions we are taking on. This is a long-term project, and an urgent one.

In pursuing and achieving objectives, we develop the capacity to seek more and more ambitious goals. This stands in stark contrast to the way reformist movements tend to collapse when their demands are realized or shown to be unrealistic. Our movements will be stronger if they can accommodate a variety of objectives, so long as those do not openly conflict. When we understand each other's objectives,

it is possible to identify where it makes sense to cooperate, and where it doesn't—a kind of clarity that does not result from lining up behind a lowest-common-denominator demand.

From this vantage point, we can see that choosing not to make demands is not necessarily a sign of political immaturity. On the contrary, it can be a savvy refusal to fall into the traps that disabled the previous generation. Let's learn our own strength, outside the cages and queues of representational politics—beyond the politics of demands.

**“Perhaps, however, the moral of the story (and the hope of the world) lies in what one demands, not of others, but of oneself.”**

**— James Baldwin,  
*No Name in the Street***

# APPENDIX: What Is Our One Demand?

The original Adbusters call for Occupy Wall Street in summer of 2011 announced that 20,000 people would take over Wall Street and agree on one demand, which they would ceaselessly repeat until the Obama regime capitulated. Yet agreeing on one demand had been deemed impossible and irrelevant by the first day of the occupation that September.

In fact, the movement superseded the organizers' initial vision; everything we remember Occupy for dates from *after* the abandonment of this plan. It was a mistake to think that thousands of people convened on the basis of a shared tactic could reduce their interests to a single lowest-common-denominator demand—and it was hopelessly reformist to think that they *should* do such a thing. Likewise, the idea that the government would have to capitulate simply on account of an occupation was just plain superstitious. This strategy—march around Jericho chanting until it magically falls—has been proven ineffective time and again; on February 15, 2003, for example, the largest worldwide protests in history failed to have any effect whatsoever on the Bush administration's mobilization to invade Iraq.

In short, the Adbusters idea was to imitate the form of the Tahrir Square occupation of 2011 as it had been mythologized in Western media, without any of its revolutionary content. The Egyptians had not set out to "make a statement" by establishing a peaceful occupation. They had risen up to fight their oppressors, burning down police stations by the score and exchanging projectiles with riot police until they gained the upper hand in the streets. The occupation of Tahrir Square was not itself the goal, but rather a consequence of a powerful social movement that directly threatened the government. When Mubarak's defeat forced Obama to acknowledge the Egyptian uprising, he disingenuously misrepresented it as a nonviolent movement; it was doubly disingenuous for North American organizers who knew better to replicate this narrative.

It was crucial for the success of Occupy that no "one demand" ever came together in New York. This showed that the participants in the Wall Street occupation were more politically astute than the initial organizers. Occupy was an open space, a plurality not just of voices but of visions. Demands oriented towards those in power direct the focus

away from what protesters can do themselves; dialogue empowers the participants and creates a space where they can weave their differences into a collective strength. To use the language of the Occupy movement, why address demands to the 1%? Why not instead address the rest of the 99%, whose collective power could render the authority of the 1% meaningless?

On the evening of September 29, participants in Occupy Wall Street unanimously agreed on their first public statement. "To the people of the world," it concluded, "We, the New York City General Assembly occupying Wall Street in Liberty Square,



urge you to assert your power." No demands were presented, only this exhortation: "Occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone." Occupy Wall Street had many shortcomings, but in this one regard, it was equal to the challenge of its time.



### If Only They Had a Head!

If only they had a head, these confounded rioters and anarchists! Why do they have to be so impractical?

If only they had a head—a leader, a representative, a chairman! It could be a rotating position; it could be determined democratically, like it is in our government.

If only they had a head, they'd be organized and efficient! Everyone would know what to expect. They wouldn't have to waste time on dialogue! They could give clear instructions—and follow them too.

If only they had a head, they could articulate a concrete program and present demands. We'd be happy to consider their proposals—alongside all the others, of course. If they only knew how sincerely we wish to understand them, to placate them!

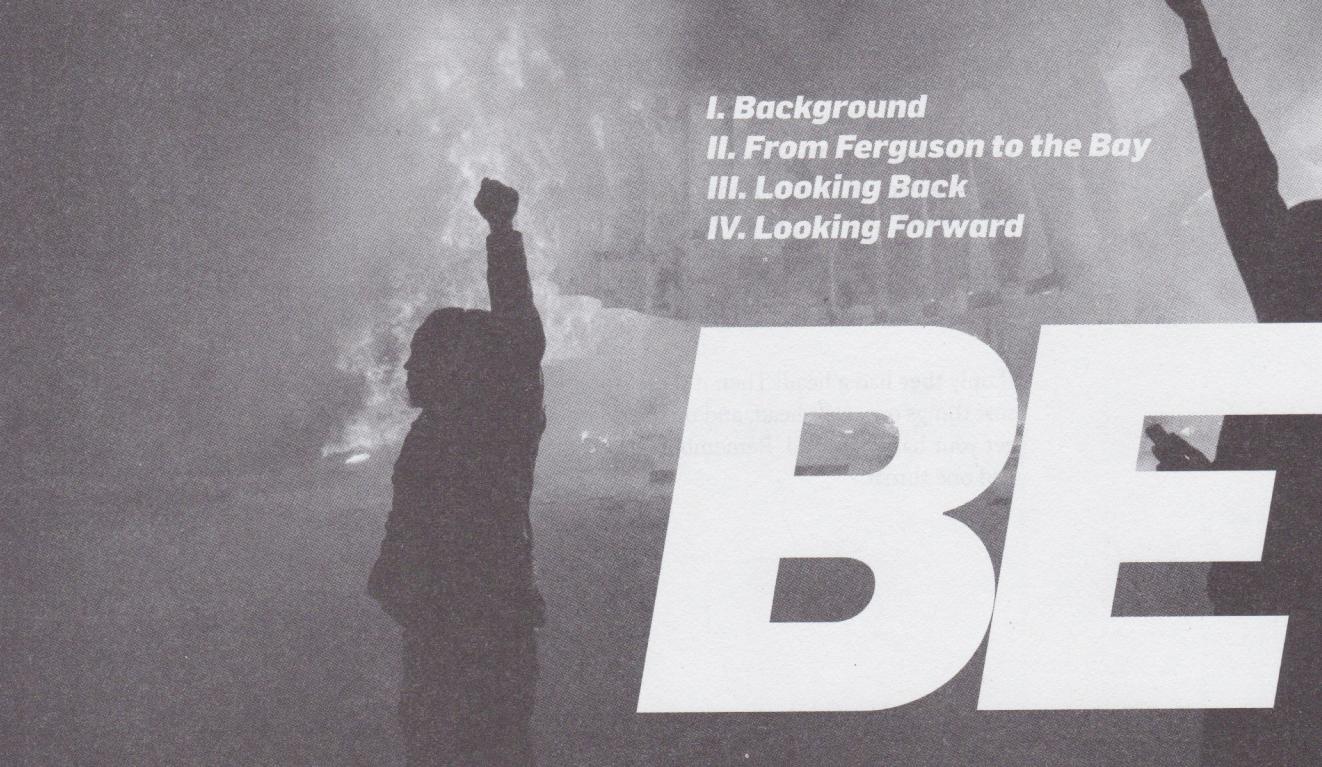
If only they had a head, there would be someone we could negotiate with! A leader can always be brought around to reason one way or another.

If only they had a head! Then if there were trouble, it would be easy to sort things out. One head, and one neck—now there's something you can get your hands around. Remember what Caligula said: "I wish all Rome had one throat."

**"Another pastor in attendance said there had been no negotiations between the police and protesters. 'Everybody's trying to be a leader, but it's not working,' he said. 'I wish we could come together and have a unified front.'"**

***-The New York Times, "Lack of Leadership and a Generational Split Hinder Protests in Ferguson"***

# FERG



- I. Background*
- II. From Ferguson to the Bay*
- III. Looking Back*
- IV. Looking Forward*

# BA L

As we assembled this overview of the uprising that spread from Ferguson in 2014, our thoughts were focused on those who have not yet been killed by police—from whose number another life is subtracted every day. Honor the dead and fight like hell for the living.

USON  
AND  
YON/3

FIGHTING  
THE POLICE &  
WHITE SUPREMACY

# I. Background

## Missouri Compromised

Our story begins in the 1850s, when Missouri was a battleground between proponents and critics of slavery. Abolitionists and other well-meaning individuals repeatedly attempted to use the courts to secure freedom and rights for black people. This was as naïve and ineffectual then\* as counting on the courts to convict police is today.

In the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, concluding a court case initiated in Missouri, the US Supreme Court ruled that people of African descent—enslaved or free—could not be accorded the rights of citizens. It also overturned the “Missouri Compromise” of 1820, intended to maintain a balance between states that practiced slavery and states that prohibited it. The Supreme Court held that the Fifth Amendment barred any law that would deprive a slaveholder of his property, such as his slaves. Furthermore, if black people were

entitled to the privileges and immunities of citizens, it would exempt them from the operation of the special laws and from the police regulations necessary for their own safety. It would give to persons of the negro race the right to go where they pleased at every hour of the day or night without molestation... it would give them full liberty of speech in public and in private, to hold public meetings upon public affairs, and to keep and carry arms wherever they went. And all of this would be done in the face of the subject race of the same color, both free and slaves, inevitably producing discontent and insubordination among them, and endangering the peace and safety of the State.

This is a concise history lesson on the institutions of US democracy. Property, the sanctity of which is asserted today by those who wring their hands about the looting in Ferguson, is revealed as a justification for robbing an entire people of their lives. Citizenship, which has divided democracy into *included* and *excluded* since ancient Athens, shows its true colors: rather than a means of transcending racism, citizenship served to introduce racial disparities, as

\* In St. Louis, racial codes prohibited a variety of relations between legally designated racial groups since the late 1600s. So-called miscegenation was prohibited well into the mid-20th century, and neighborhood ordinances effectively prevented black people from owning houses in Ferguson through the 1960s. These laws were essential in creating the racial tensions that persist up to the present day.

it serves to perpetuate them today.<sup>†</sup> The court system put the stamp of legitimacy on all this, validating racial divisions so poor white people would have an interest in siding with the wealthy against poor people of color. Nothing was more terrifying to the honorable and learned men of the Supreme Court than the possibility that black people might speak, travel, and bear arms freely, mingling with the rest of society. The Dred Scott decision should make an anarchist out of any person of good conscience: for either one is bound to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Court, the highest law in the land, or one is bound to abide one's own conscience regardless of what any court rules.

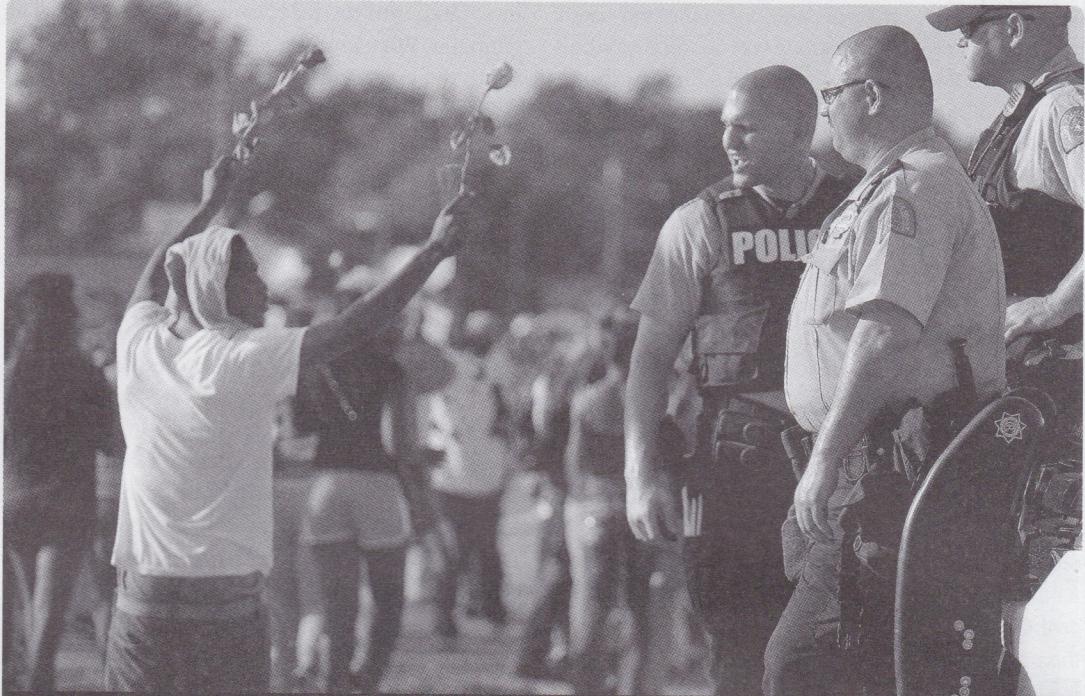
Countless black and indigenous rebels came to the second conclusion, along with at least a few white people. One of these was John Brown, who led a raid into Missouri at the end of 1858 to liberate a handful of slaves, killing one slaveholder and seizing the belongings of another. Thus began the countdown to his raid on Harper's Ferry, which triggered the Civil War. It was illegal direct action in support of black resistance that forced the issue of slavery, not legal recourse or peaceful protest.

## Ferguson Today

Fast forward through the reorganization of capitalism from plantation slavery to industrial wage labor: capitalists have to pay for the upkeep of slaves through thick and thin, while workers can be hired and fired as needed. Fast forward through the re-stabilization of white supremacy by the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups that were autonomous of the state and yet complementary to it (just like the pioneers who formed the vanguard of colonization, whose frontier spirit is remembered so fondly by “libertarian” capitalists today). Fast forward through the civil rights movement, much of which was channeled into institutional struggles for inclusion that ultimately stabilized white supremacy once more—offering a pressure valve for an upwardly mobile minority while the majority of black people languish in poverty and, increasingly, in prison.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, St. Louis, Missouri was a thriving industrial center, drawing massive numbers of black workers. When globalization drew factory production out of North America, reducing cities like Detroit and St. Louis to Rust Belt ghost towns, black workers were the first to suffer, left to starve in decaying urban cores.

<sup>†</sup> See the article about the US-Mexico border, “Designed to Kill,” in *Rolling Thunder* #10.



*Hundreds of years of racism, alive and well in Missouri today.*

Despite formal desegregation, explicitly racialized power remained as economically spacialized power. Around the country, urban blight and aggressive development slowly broke up longstanding poor and black communities, dispersing people to new suburban ghettos. Ferguson is a satellite town just outside St. Louis; between 1990 and 2010, its black population more than doubled, while more than half of the white population fled to other suburbs.

In 2008, the economic crisis hit, once again impacting black people first and worst. Ferguson was in the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis in Missouri; for years, banks had preyed on families, extending them sub-prime mortgages. Consequently, as unemployment spiked, many were left impoverished and homeless, or crowded into housing complexes.

All this gives the lie to rhetoric about people “destroying their own neighborhoods.” Many in Ferguson own nothing at all; they have only recently been forced to move there, driven by market forces that will soon drive them on again. Pundits bewailed the economic setbacks that the rioting might inflict on an already suffering town, but this confuses the profits of developers with the needs of actual residents. If Ferguson is developed and experiences an economic upswing, its poorest residents will not benefit from this—they’ll be forced out by rising costs. In fact, for the poor and unemployed, rioting might be the only hope of improving their prospects: in March

2015, the QuikTrip Corporation announced that it would donate the property of the QT that was burned in August 2014 to host a job training center, to be funded by \$1.2 million in donations from St. Louis businesses. It took weeks of rioting and arson to secure this single concession from the profiting class.

## The Thin Blue Line Is a Burning Fuse

It would not be possible to sustain any of these inequalities without the police—the backbone of racialized power.

The militarization of the police isn’t just a way to sustain the profitability of the military-industrial complex beyond the end of the Cold War; it’s also a means of controlling the restless surplus populations of the post-industrial era. Just as it has been necessary to deploy troops around the world to secure the raw materials that keep the economy afloat, it is becoming necessary to deploy troops in the US to preserve the unequal distribution of resources at home. The austerity measures pioneered by the IMF in Africa, Asia, and South America are now being employed in the wealthiest nations of the first world; accordingly, the techniques of threat management and counter-insurgency that were debuted against Palestinians, Afghans, and Iraqis are now

being turned against the populations of the countries that invaded them. Private military contractors who operated in Peshawar in 2006 worked in Ferguson in 2014, alongside tanks that had rolled through Baghdad. For now, this is limited to the poorest, blackest neighborhoods of the US; but what seems exceptional today will be commonplace tomorrow.

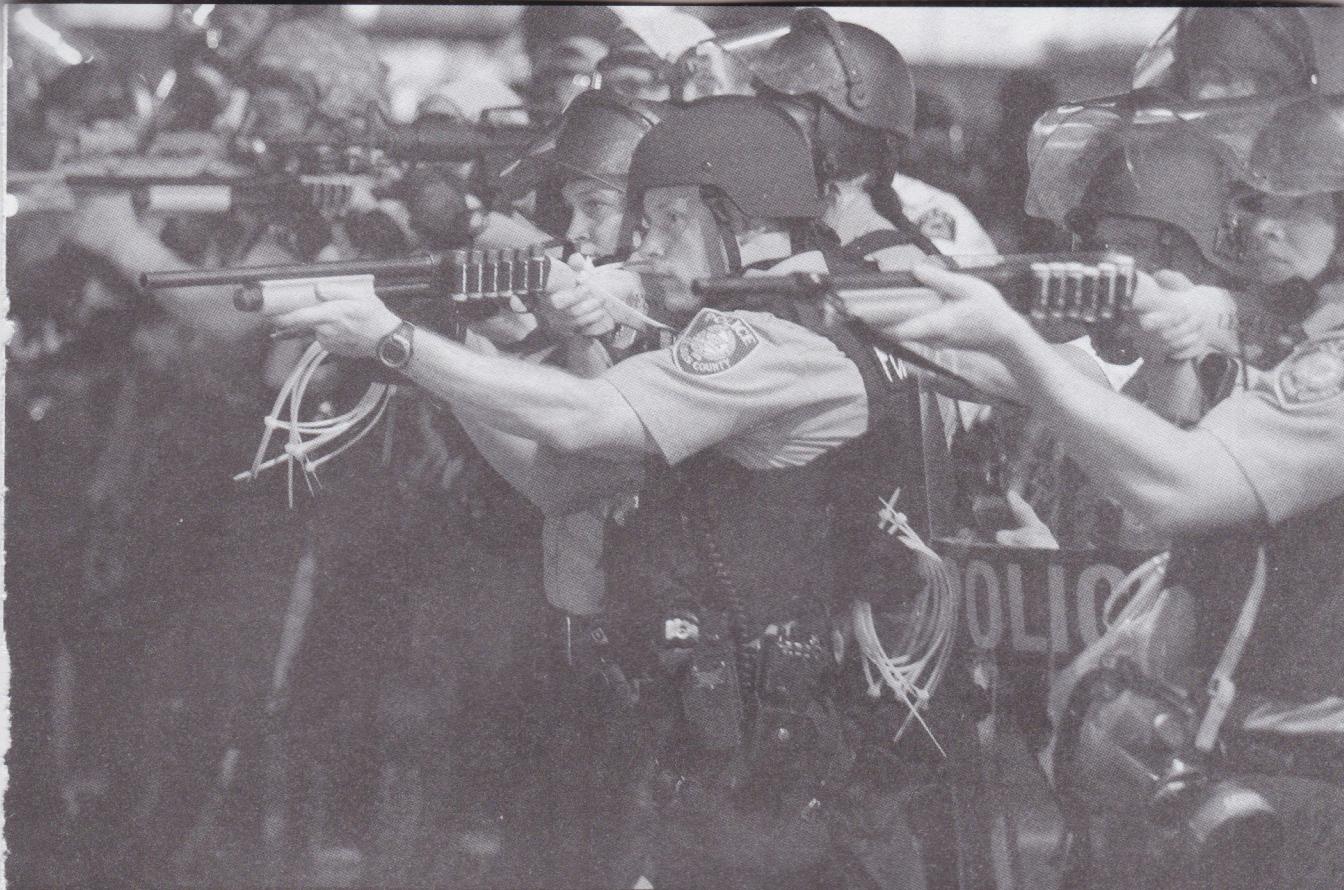
That explains why struggles against the police have taken center stage in the popular imagination over the past decade. Police form the front line of capitalism and racism in every fight. As a homeowner or renter, you might not meet the bank director or landlord who forces you out, but you will see the sheriff who comes to repossess your home or evict you. As a black person, you might never enter the gated communities of the chief beneficiaries of white privilege, but you will encounter the overtly racist officers who profile, bully, and arrest you. As an activist, you might never see the CEO who profits on fracking your water supply, but you'll see the police who break up your protest against him.

The civil rights struggles of two generations ago have become struggles against the police: today, a black man can become president, but he's exponentially more likely to be murdered by a police officer. The workers' struggles of a generation ago have become struggles against the police: in place of steady employment, a population rendered expendable by globalization and automation can only be

integrated into the functioning of the economy at gunpoint. What bosses once were to workers, police are to the precarious and unemployed.

In view of all this, it's not surprising that police violence has been the catalyst for most of the major movements, uprisings, and revolutions of the past several years. The riots that shook Greece in December 2008, sparked by the police murder of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos, ushered in the era of worldwide anti-austerity resistance. The riots in response to the police murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland at the opening of 2009 set the stage for the Bay Area to host the high-water mark of Occupy. The day of protest that sparked the Egyptian revolution of 2011 was scheduled for National Police Day, January 25, by the Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said, which memorialized another young man killed by police. Occupy Wall Street didn't gain traction until footage of police attacks circulated in late September 2011. The police eviction of Occupy Oakland, in which officers fractured the skull of Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen, brought the Occupy movement to its peak, provoking the blockade of the Port of Oakland that served as a model for the highway blockades that spread from Ferguson. In 2013, the fare hike protests in Brazil and the Gezi Resistance in Turkey both metastasized from small single-issue protests into massive uprisings as a result of clumsy police repression; then the same

**The same constant imposition of force that took Michael Brown's life separates millions like him from the resources they need on a daily basis. In this light, the looting in Ferguson, Oakland, and elsewhere makes perfect sense as a form of protest. It was a way of solving the immediate problems of poverty, rebelling against the violence of the authorities, and emphasizing that change has to be more thoroughgoing than mere police reform.**



*The army of the rich, the vanguard of white supremacy.*

thing happened in Eastern Europe, setting off the Ukrainian revolution at the end of 2013 and sparking the Bosnian uprising of February 2014.

Other cities around the US have witnessed a series of intensifying rebellions against police murders: Seattle and Atlanta in 2011, Anaheim in 2012, Brooklyn and Durham in 2013. It isn't just that the police are called in to repress every movement as soon as it poses any threat to the prevailing distribution of power (although that remains as true as ever). Rather, *repression itself* has been producing the flashpoints of revolt.

## Betrayed by the System

Despite widespread hope that Obama's election heralded the coming of a post-racial America, racial disparities only worsened while he was in office. In retrospect, this expectation sounds so naïve that few will even admit to it—but how else can we explain the euphoria that greeted his victory in 2008, prompting even anarchists to suspend their usual counter-inaugural protests?

During democratic presidencies in the US, there seems to be a period after the mid-term elections

that is prone to social upheaval. The Seattle WTO demonstrations of 1999 occurred in the third year of Bill Clinton's second term, interrupting the neo-liberal triumphalism that characterized the 1990s. The Occupy movement of 2011 occurred during the third year of Obama's first term, bringing anti-capitalism into mainstream discourse for the first time in generations. It is not surprising, then, that the second wave of rebellion under America's first black president, occurring at the analogous point in his second term, focused on race. At this point in the electoral cycle, no one had any illusions that electoral politics could address racial inequalities, and there was no more incentive for even Obama's staunchest supporters to keep quiet.

It's tempting to believe that the general public is becoming progressively disillusioned—with neo-liberalism, with capitalism, with liberal notions of racial equality and “progress.” But just as Obama's initial campaign re-mystified the disenchanted millions, we will likely see future political parties accomplish the same thing, as Syriza has in Greece. There's a sucker born every minute, ready to fall for age-old tricks. As long as representational politics commands the hopes and imaginations of so many US citizens, electoral rhythms will modulate the

pace of social movements—triggering them every so often, but suppressing them the rest of the time. We should be ready to seize the opportunities that arise when politicians fail to deliver on their promises, but in the long run we have to transform that disillusionment into a feeling of possibility outside the electoral system.

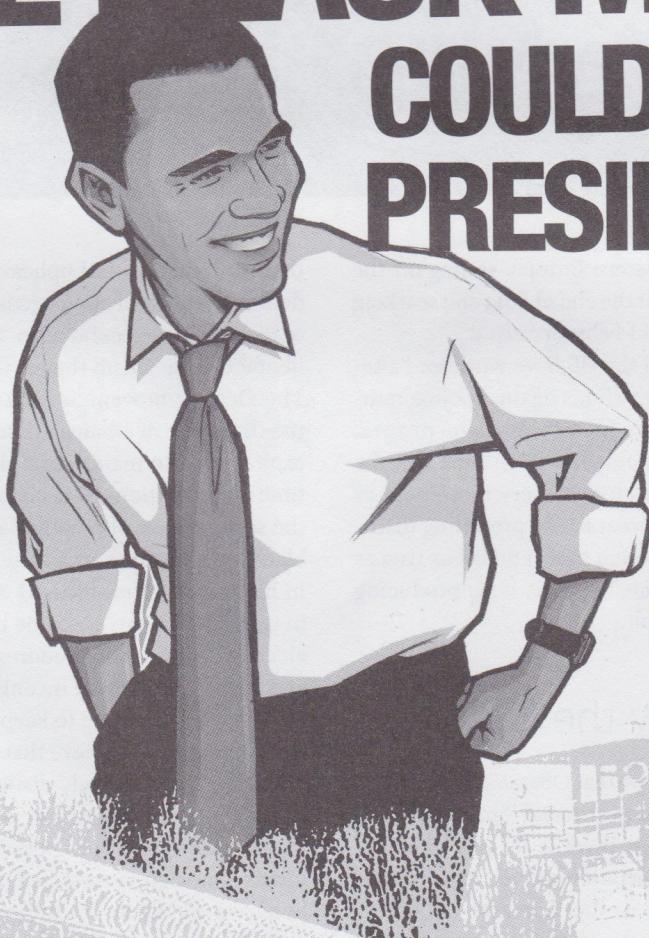
## From Occupy to Ferguson

In early 2011, in response to austerity measures, protesters occupied the capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. It was a localized struggle, but it

gained traction on the popular imagination out of all proportion to its size. This clearly indicated that something big was coming, and some anarchists even brainstormed about how to prepare for it—but all the same, the nationwide wave of Occupy a few months later caught everyone flat-footed.

In August 2014, after white police officer Darren Wilson killed unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a week and a half of pitched protests shook the town. Once again, these were localized, but they loomed big in the popular imagination. Police kill people every day in the US, but until that August it hadn't gained traction on the public consciousness. What was new about

# ONE BLACK MAN COULD BE PRESIDENT



## ONE MILLION BLACK MEN ARE IN PRISON

the Ferguson protests was not just that people refused to cede the streets to the police for days on end,\* nor that they openly defied the “community leadership” that usually pacifies such revolts. It was also that all around the country, people were finally paying attention and expressing approval. Like the occupation of the capitol building in Madison, this portended things to come. Ferguson is a microcosm of the US; what happened there could happen anywhere.

The Occupy movement subsided without achieving its object of transforming society. We can identify three built-in limits that contributed to this. First, it offered almost no analysis of racialized power, despite the central role of race in dividing labor struggles and poor people’s resistance in the US. Second, perhaps not coincidentally, its discourse was largely legalistic and reformist—it was premised on the assumption that the laws and institutions of the state are fundamentally beneficial, or at least legitimate. Finally, it began as a *political* rather than social movement—hence the initial decision to occupy Wall Street instead of acting on a terrain closer to most people’s everyday lives, as if capitalism were not a ubiquitous relation but something emanating from the stock market.

As a result of these three factors, the majority of the participants in Occupy were activists, newly precarious exiles from the middle class, and members of the underclass, in roughly that order; the working poor were notably absent. The simplistic sloganering of Occupy obscured the lines of conflict that run through our society from top to bottom: “police are part of the 99%” is technically true, economically speaking, but so are most rapists and white supremacists. All of this meant that when the police came to evict the encampments and kill the movement, Occupy had neither the numbers, nor the fierceness, nor the analysis it needed to defend itself.

When a movement reaches its limits and subsides, it illustrates the obstacles future movements will have to surpass. Accordingly, the model of struggle

\* Occupy Wall Street was awkward to say the least for the first week of its existence; it only entered history because it went on long enough for more people to trickle in. The revolt in Ferguson was only one of many such outbursts in a series stretching at least back to the 2009 Oscar Grant riots in Oakland. The difference was that it persisted long enough to spread. *If a revolt can extend in time, it will extend in space.*

originating in Ferguson transcended the failures of Occupy. Where Occupy whitewashed the issue of race, the Ferguson protests placed it front and center. Where Occupy confined itself to the unfavorable terrain of “political” physical sites and reformist demands, the people who rose up in Ferguson were fighting on their own streets for their own very lives. Whereas, with the temporary exception of Occupy Oakland, Occupy lacked the will to stand down the police, people in Ferguson braved tear gas and bullets to do just that. Where Occupy sought to conceal all the different forms of hierarchy and strife that cut through this society beneath the unifying banner of “the 99%,” the conflicts in Ferguson pushed them to the fore.

## The Center Is Everywhere

In today’s hyperlinked world, revolt can proceed from the bottom to the top and from the periphery to the center, as Bakunin once prescribed. How many people had previously heard of Ferguson or of Sidi Bouzid, the town in Tunisia where Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and sparked the uprisings of the Arab Spring?

This poses further questions about the relationship between the hotspots and the hinterlands. Should aspiring insurgents focus on intensifying high-profile struggles in radical meccas like the San Francisco Bay Area, in hopes that they will catalyze revolt elsewhere? Or should we regard those as the effects, rather than the causes, of ruptures in little-known towns that are not already quarantined as radical enclaves? Although both Occupy and the wave of revolt emanating from Ferguson arguably reached their peaks in the Bay Area, neither began there, and many of the participants had moved there from elsewhere. Even if we measure the progress and intensity of revolt by what happens in the hotspots, it may be that to push things further, we have to focus on the hinterlands.

What convergence and concentration were to the anti-globalization movement at the turn of the century, simultaneity and diffusion are today. Just as capitalism and white supremacy are everywhere, any expression of resistance can instantly replicate and spread.

## II. From Ferguson to the Bay, August to December 2014



### AN UPRISING PERSISTS AND SPREADS

For the sake of concision, we've limited ourselves to the voices of our immediate comrades, sometimes at the risk of centering the experiences of predominantly white participants. This is a good place to learn about how some anarchists participated in the protests that spread from Ferguson, but not to form a comprehensive understanding of how and why they occurred.

We drew from the zine *No We Won't Go Home*, the *Missouri Prison Newsletter*, the *Antistate STL* website, and many other sources.

**AUGUST 9 (SATURDAY)** - Michael Brown is shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson. Brown was walking home from a convenience store to his grandmother's house when Wilson stopped him for jaywalking and a scuffle ensued. Witnesses report that the officer shot Brown as he fled with his hands up in surrender. A crowd quickly grows; shots are fired into the air and a dumpster is set on fire. Police respond with an armored riot vehicle, a helicopter, dogs, and assault rifles. As anger grows, the police are forced to withdraw.

As the night drags on, the politicians arrive. OBS, NOI, NBPP, UAPO,\* alphabet soup. They're trying, with little success, to grab the attention of a relatively small crowd. Instead of joining us as we face the police station, they face us, trying to

\* The Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) and Universal African Peoples Organization (UAPO) are decades-old black-led organizations based in St. Louis. The Nation of Islam (NOI) and the New Black Panther Party (NBPP) are national organizations with a roughly separatist agenda. ("There is no new Black Panther Party" -members of the original Black Panther Party).



*Mourners in Ferguson at the site where Michael Brown was murdered, August 10.*

tell everyone how we *need* to act, what *needs* to happen next, who *will* be involved in a futile and meaningless negotiation, as if those of us on either side of the line that is being drawn have anything to say to those on the other.

**AUGUST 10 (SUNDAY)** - In the evening, crowds gather for a prayer vigil at the site of the shooting, in the Canfield apartments. The crowd marches to W. Florissant where police have massed. The protesters confront the police line, yelling insults and throwing things. Three or four police cruisers attempt to drive through the crowd. People surround them and smash out their windows.

After police exit the scene, people begin to celebrate. Some march down to the Quick Trip; others attempt to march to the police station, but meet a wall of police. Protesters smash the windows of the QuikTrip and others flood in to loot the store. People openly drive cars onto W. Florissant and fill them with looted goods. Police respond with tear gas, but mostly remain clear of the crowd. Later, someone reportedly shoots at the police helicopter circling above.

The crowd remains in the street late into the night. By the time things die down, the looting has spread to twelve businesses, with multiple dumpsters on fire. A fire completely engulfs the QT and reduces it to rubble. Two officers have been injured by rocks and bottles.

It's about 8:10 when I show up. Exiting the highway, I see six cop cars parked at the gas station. Across the street, there are more than 10 police SUVs parked in the cemetery. We comment on how they're just being prepared for what might happen, yet nothing could prepare us for the amount of police ahead. We drive another mile down Lucas and Hunt, and as we head north, traffic gets incredibly thick. Then the police cars start speeding past us. It's impossible for them to get through, so they speed dangerously past on the opposite side of the street. We can't make it to the apartment complex by car because there are so many people, police, police cars, dogs, kids.

We park and make the hike in—past over a hundred cop cars.

---

The police on the southern end of the street, where the rowdier crowd is, call for more backup from the police blocking off the north side. Instead of navigating the side streets, the scared and hasty cops drive their cars through a mob of hundreds or more people who are growing bolder all the time. The first two or three cars slowly make their way through the crowd, but by the fourth people are physically stopping the cars, beating on them and

eventually all you can hear is one loud thud after another as people stomp the police cars. The door of one cop car is pulled open, but the car speeds off before the cops inside are extracted. The police are just running a gauntlet of angry people. Lots of cheering. Almost everyone has stopped being afraid.

You might expect the crowd of attackers to be young men in their early 20s or teens, but all genders and all ages are getting their kicks in. I see people as young as 10 or 12 years old attacking the cars and people in their 50s too.

Once the police have made it to the south side, it seems clear that the block is ours. The police are maintaining lines at Ferguson Avenue (to the south) and just north of the bridge for the 270 interchange (to the north). The mile or so between is totally unpoliced and filled with thousands of people.

This commercial stretch, full of parasitical businesses, has numerous small roads leading east into the densely populated neighborhoods just a block away. The police, too afraid and outnumbered to enter a residential area seething with outrage, are unable to block those streets. As they hear about what is going on, people are pouring into the commercial district on foot, in cars, on motorcycles. For once, the geography of this suburb is on our side.

---

In the QT, it looks like people three or four deep just lining the windows. The gas prices are ripped down off the big sign out front and "SNITCHES" is painted on it. "RIP MIKE MIKE," "187 County Police," and other messages adorn the brick of the QT. Elsewhere along the street: "AVENGE MIKE MIKE" "FUCK DA POLICE," "KILL COPS," "THE ONLY GOOD COP IS A DEAD COP," "SNITCHES GET STITCHES," "AN EYE FOR AN EYE MAKES OUR MASTERS BLIND," and "MIKE BROWN, THIS FOR YOU."

---

A pallet of water bottles. I grab a case and hand them out; it's August after all. "There's more where that came from." Everyone is eager for a first drink of looted beer and packs of smokes are passed around. *Might as well, even though it tastes like shit. Come to think of it, I don't actually want any of this crap. But that's not really the point, is it?*

Some have started to work on the cash register as lottery tickets rain down from the sky and celebratory shots are fired into the air. *Are they taking aim at God or just sending a warning to the cops?*

Either way, it's a little too close for comfort. Fear is still with me, but it's not controlling me.

Next, it's Sam's Meat Market, the beauty shops, Red's BBQ. Someone has a go at the Liberty tax prep office while others are trying to get into the storage units across the street. Dumpsters are being set on fire as cars speed wildly up and down the strip. Young people with masked faces leaning out the windows showing off their looted bottles, flipping off the police helicopter.

A ten-year-old girl carrying a large sack full of food says, "We're gonna eat good at school tomorrow."

---

"Hey, can you get me some 'rillos?" A group of young women peer around the corner at the gas station being emptied of its contents.

"Nah, but you can, they're free tonight."

"We don't got a mask though. You got another one?"

"Here, it's easy, just take the t-shirt and put your head through the neck hole like you're gonna put it on. Then turn it into a hood and tie the sleeves behind your head."

After two and a half hours, the looting has spread within fifty yards of the southern police line and backup has arrived in sufficient quantities to begin clearing the strip. The stationary phalanx has started to move and everyone is running back into the neighborhood. We hear a rumor that the Foot Locker on the other side of the cops is being looted, but then we see it: plumes of black smoke and an orange glow on the horizon.

Like moths we are drawn towards the flames. "The smoke so thick down there you can't even breathe." Armored personnel carriers block access to the fire, shining powerfully bright lights in our direction. Back the other way. Maybe we can still get some shoes to replace the ones falling apart on our feet.

A man runs out of the woods, coming from where we're headed. "It's over, Foot Locker's done. The cops showed up. They lockin' people up." He warns a few more behind us and then, loaded down with shoeboxes, dips into his house.

A young kid on a bike rolls up as we walk back to the car.

"Hey, y'all black bloc?"

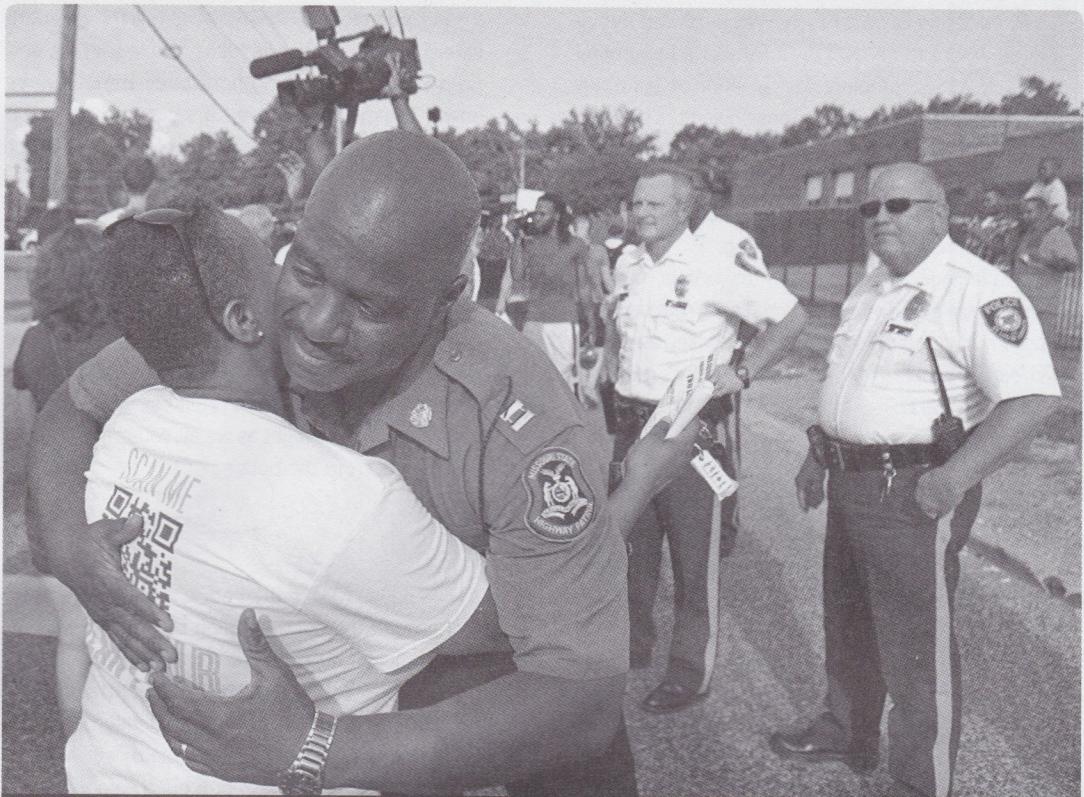
"Uh... Yeah, sort of."

"Me too, I'm one of those anar..."

"Anarchists?"

"Yeah, that's me."

"Black bloc's not a group you belong to, it's just



*Where brute force fails, try cooptation: Missouri Highway Patrol Captain Ron Johnson attempts to ingratiate himself to protesters in Ferguson, as white police look on.*

a way to stay safe in the streets. When everybody wears the same color and covers their face it makes it harder for the cops to arrest you."

"Cool. Why y'all out here?"

"Cause we're pissed about what happened. Isn't that why everyone's here?"

"Yeah... but I heard I could get some free shit too."

As we head back home, cop cars are still racing in from distant jurisdictions. I roll the window down and let the night air blow through my hair knowing that this moment will never be erased.

**AUGUST 11 (MONDAY)** - Crowds attempt to gather at the burned QuikTrip. As soon as people begin to block the street, they are attacked by riot police with armored personnel carriers, tear gas, and rubber bullets. The cops set up static lines on either end of W. Florissant while neighborhood residents and others yell and throw stones. Neighborhood residents come to the aid of those from outside the area, giving them directions and leading them through the surrounding neighborhoods. Mild street fighting continues late into the night as protestors discuss the need for continued determination, more supplies, and new tactics such as strikes and walkouts.

Looting threatens to spread as smash and grabs occur in south St. Louis and the Galleria Mall in West County. Police deploy pre-emptively in dense commercial districts downtown and in University City.

**AUGUST 12 (TUESDAY)** - Again, people attempt to stage a protest at the QT and are attacked by militarized riot police. Some of the crowd marches to a rally at a local church where Al Sharpton is speaking. Outside, the mood is tense. Hundreds of people are milling around the yard of the church, the sidewalk, and the street, holding signs, yelling, and talking, while motorists drive up and down the street honking their horns in support. Racial conflicts surface within the crowd. Late that night, five people are shot, one by police.

The police have started to blame organized white anarchists for instigating the mayhem on Sunday night. Others on Twitter and Facebook are following their lead, unwittingly playing into the new police disinformation strategy of our era: the anarchist as outside agitator.

As we drive in, a large crowd is headed away from ground zero, the burned out gas station newly

named "Mike Brown Plaza." We park and decide to go where the crowd is—a rally at a local black church. Al Sharpton presiding, Nation of Islam running security. The mood is tense given the previous nights of rioting, police attacks, and arrests, but hundreds of people are here, lining the sidewalks and the median. The street is full of cars. The incessant honking is overwhelming.

I'm facing the street, trying to work up the courage to strike up a conversation. Then from behind, a commotion. I see my friend being chased away by a stream of people. I try to intercede. "What's going on? What are you doing?" Immediately I'm surrounded. Large men are standing close all around me.

"Get out of here. This is a black space."

"If you an anarchist, you need to leave."

"We don't want that anarchist shit here."

*This is the most important moment of my entire life. They're gonna have to kill me to keep me away.*

"No. I'm staying."

A slender black arm reaches across my chest and pulls me out of the crowd. "No, we want him here," she yells. "Him being here proves this ain't about black versus white."

Another man approaches, wants to get his picture taken with me. "Come here, get in the picture," he yells to his friend. We hold hands like in a poster for racial unity. Another arm around my back.

"What was that about?" No one seems to have the answer.

I'm shaken. I don't want to leave. I want to stay with these people who just rescued me, who value my presence, who in this moment I feel closer to than my own brother. But I can't help feeling like an outsider, like I no longer belong. I feel small.

**AUGUST 13 (WEDNESDAY)** - A familiar scene plays out on West Florissant. Crowds gather and are attacked by police. This time some protestors come prepared. A small number of Molotov cocktails are thrown at the police lines along with rocks and returned tear gas canisters. Things are escalating.

**AUGUST 14 (THURSDAY)** - As President Obama speaks on the events in Ferguson, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon puts the State Highway Patrol in charge of the protests, under the leadership of Ron Johnson, a black officer. Johnson promises to be less heavy-handed than the County Police. Protesters fill West Florissant early in the day with cars and barbecues.

The QT has been a gathering point since it was burned, but today is the first day it feels like the epicenter of a movement. It has transformed from

a gas station to a burned building to a thriving park where people exchange ideas, make friends, and prepare for the coming fight once the sun goes down. The mood is festive; cars blast music, some loaded with people shouting out of the windows or riding on the hoods.

Three separate times, the police attempt to enter the crowd and are chased out. Even the commanding officers are surrounded, shouted down, and chased to their cars and out of the demonstration. One can smell the fear from the officers and see the sweat on their foreheads. Despite the efforts of wannabe politicians, the presence on the streets lasts long into the night as we all celebrate winning the streets from the police.



The police have pulled back. They're still there just around the corner, hiding behind the thin veneer of social peace, ready to jump into action at a moment's notice, but they're not attacking us tonight. They've retreated, strategically, but it was the fierceness of our fight and the threat of more to come that made them pull out. I've outrun and evaded the police before, but I've never seen them fall back, I've never been part of something powerful enough to bind their hands. Not until now.

It feels like everyone else is experiencing this small victory with me for the first time as well. The half-mile strip of W. Florissant is a victory parade ground. All that's missing are the streamers and confetti. There are a thousand people on the street tonight and a thousand more passing through in their cars.

Everyone must be feeling good. I'm back at the church and a large black man in fatigues motions for me to come talk to him.

"I saw you here the other night and I meant to pull you aside."

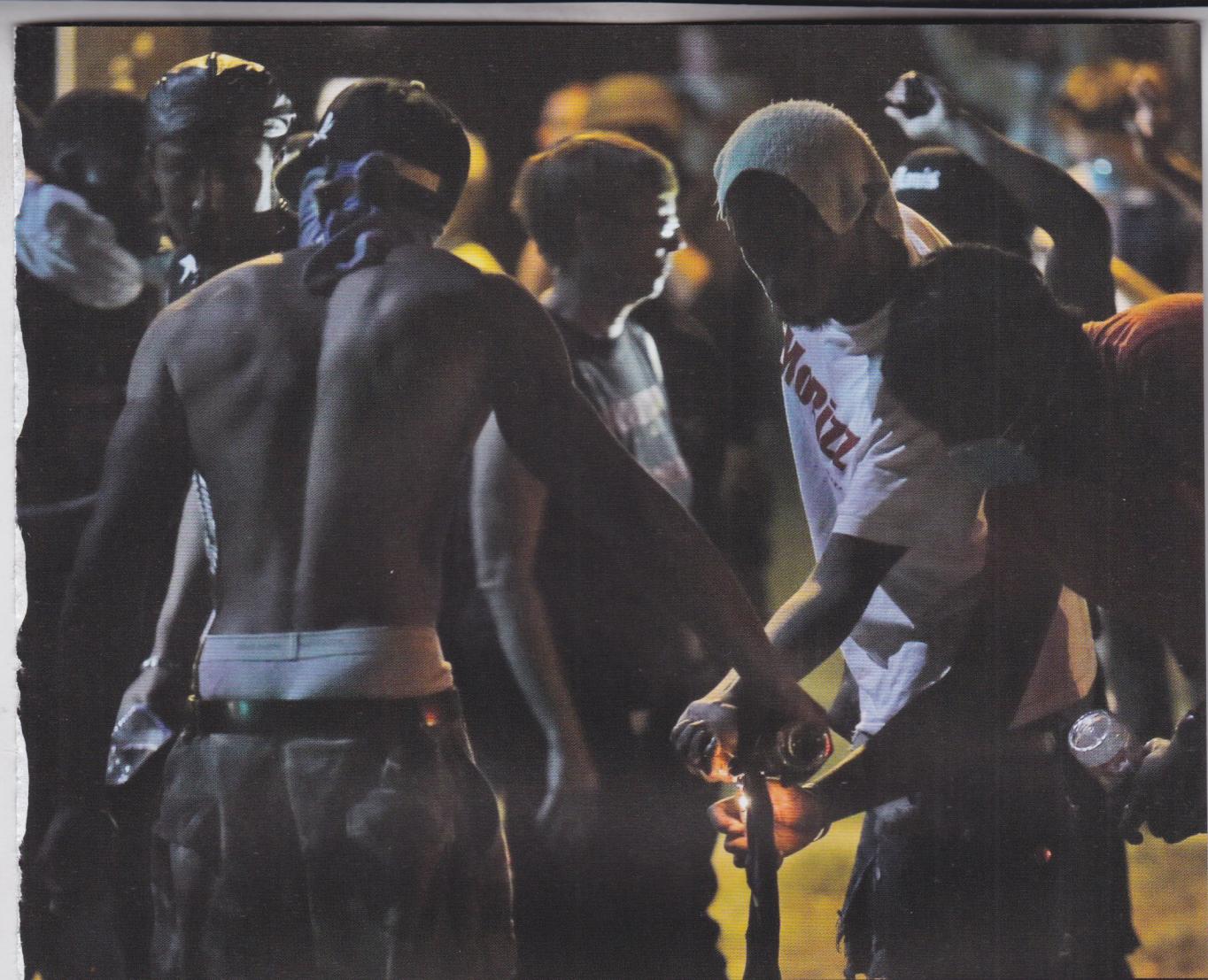
"Yeah, that was crazy. What was that all about? If there's a problem I hope we can talk it out."

"I don't even know. That's not what I'm about. I'm on some anti-government shit. I was one of them chasin' your friend away. I didn't want to see no disrespect for the Brown family. But I guess I just got caught up in it."

"Yeah me too."

"I seen you out here and I just want to let you know where I'm at. I got gas masks in my car. I'm ready for whatever. I been in touch with my militia brothers. They say they can have boots on the ground tomorrow."

"Damn, alright." *Holy fuck, this shit is way over my head. Is this a trap? Is this guy for real?*



Protesters with Molotov cocktails in Ferguson August 13.

A celebratory environment in downtown Ferguson on the night of Thursday, August 14.

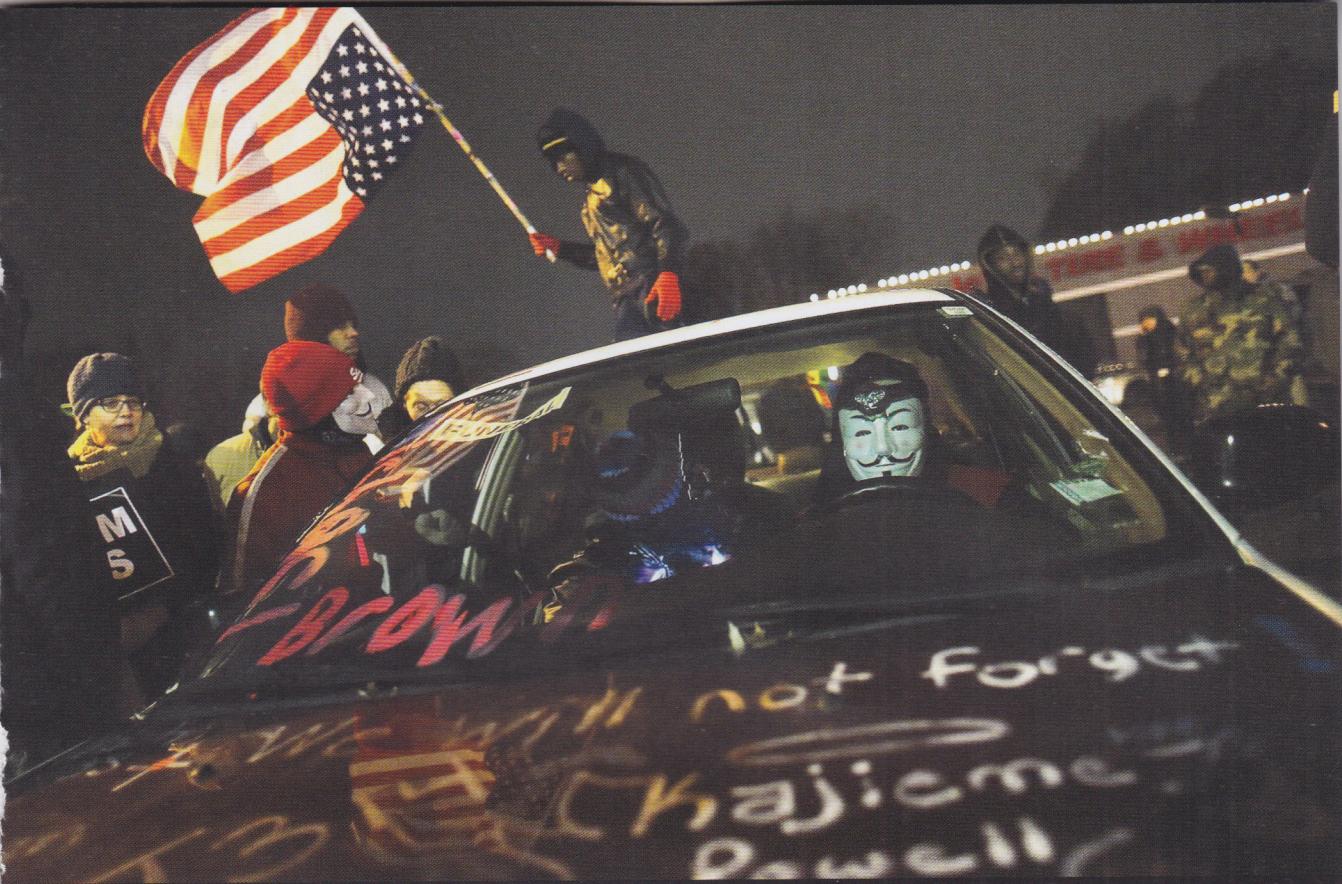




Ferguson, August 18.

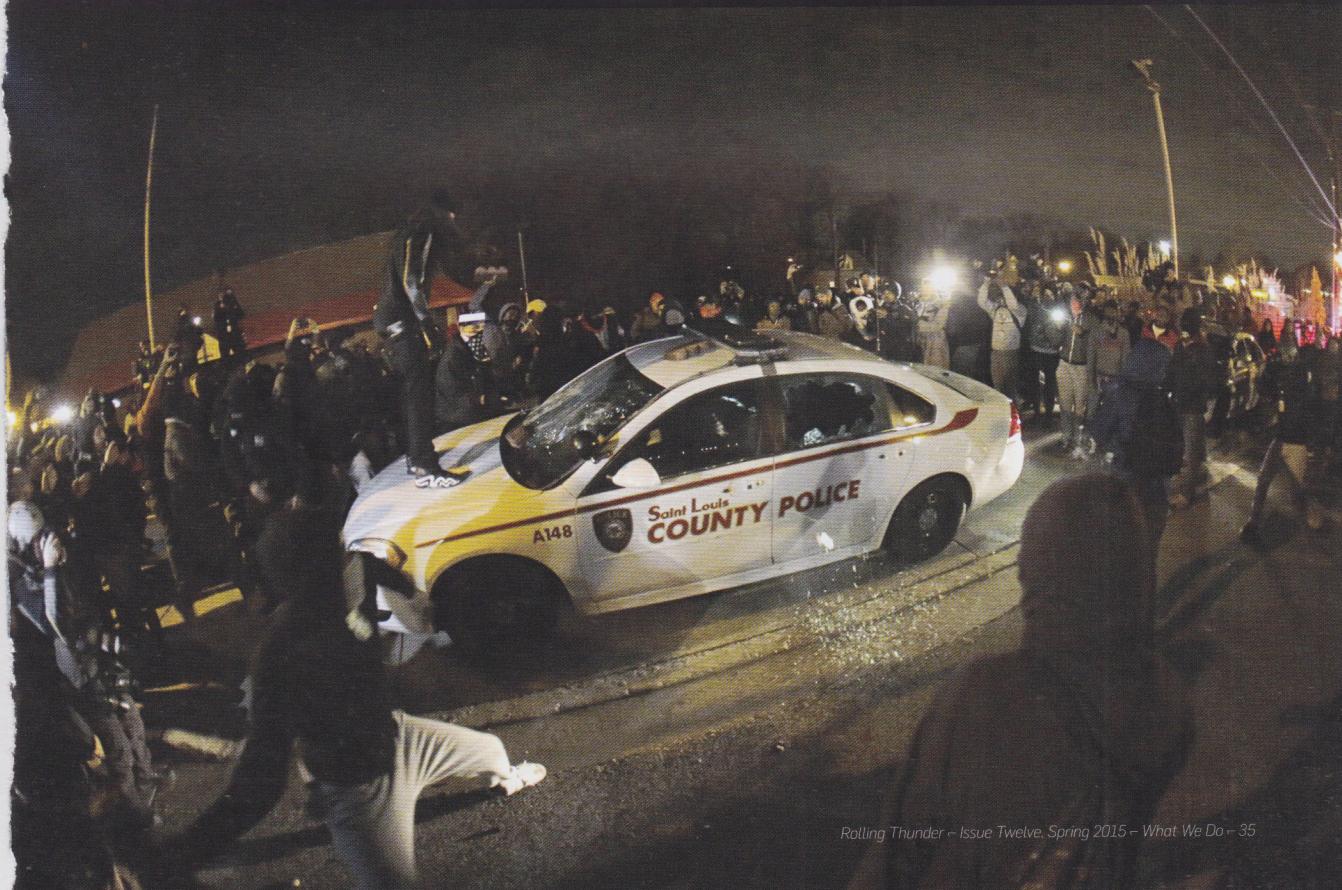
Ferguson, August 20.

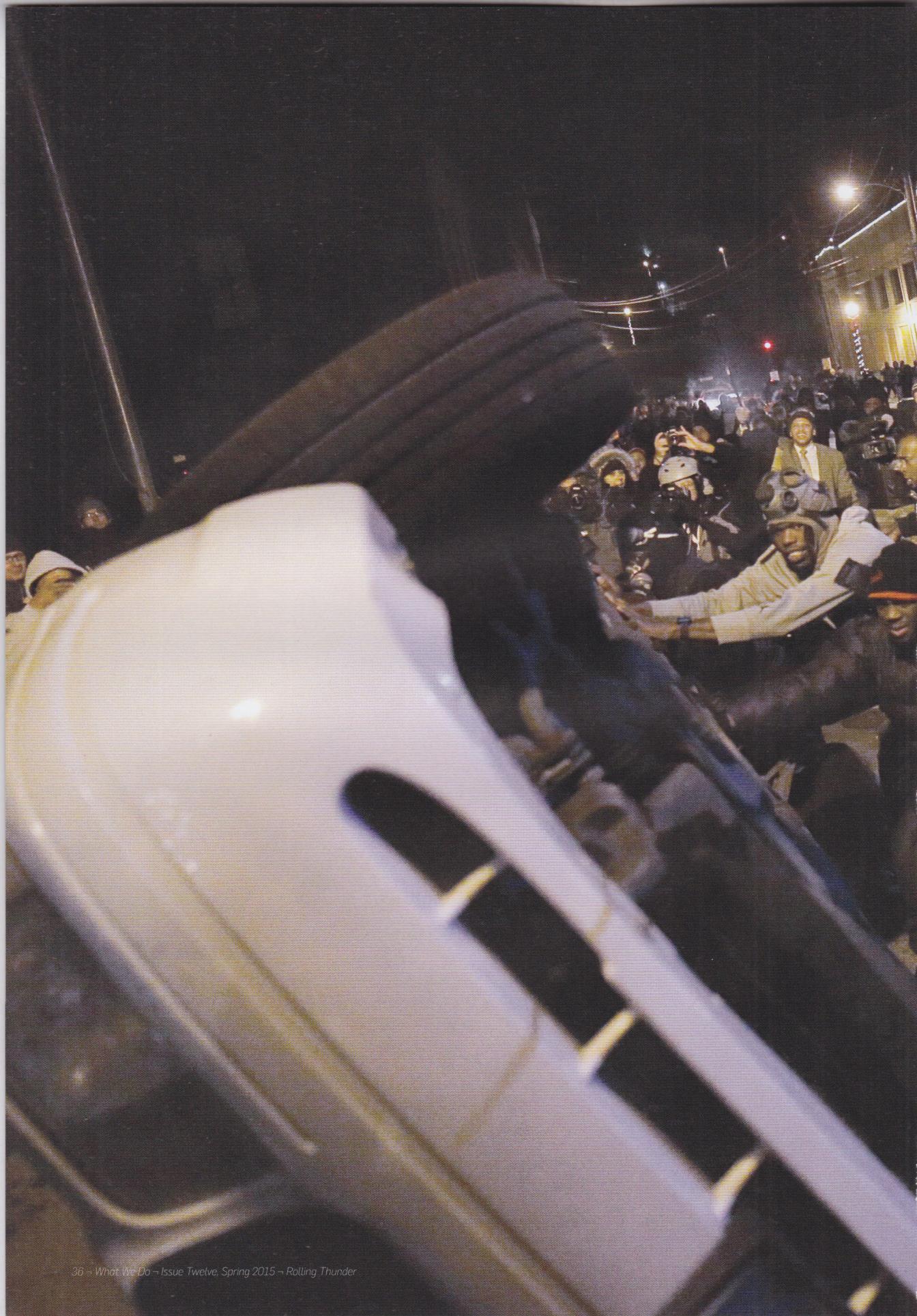


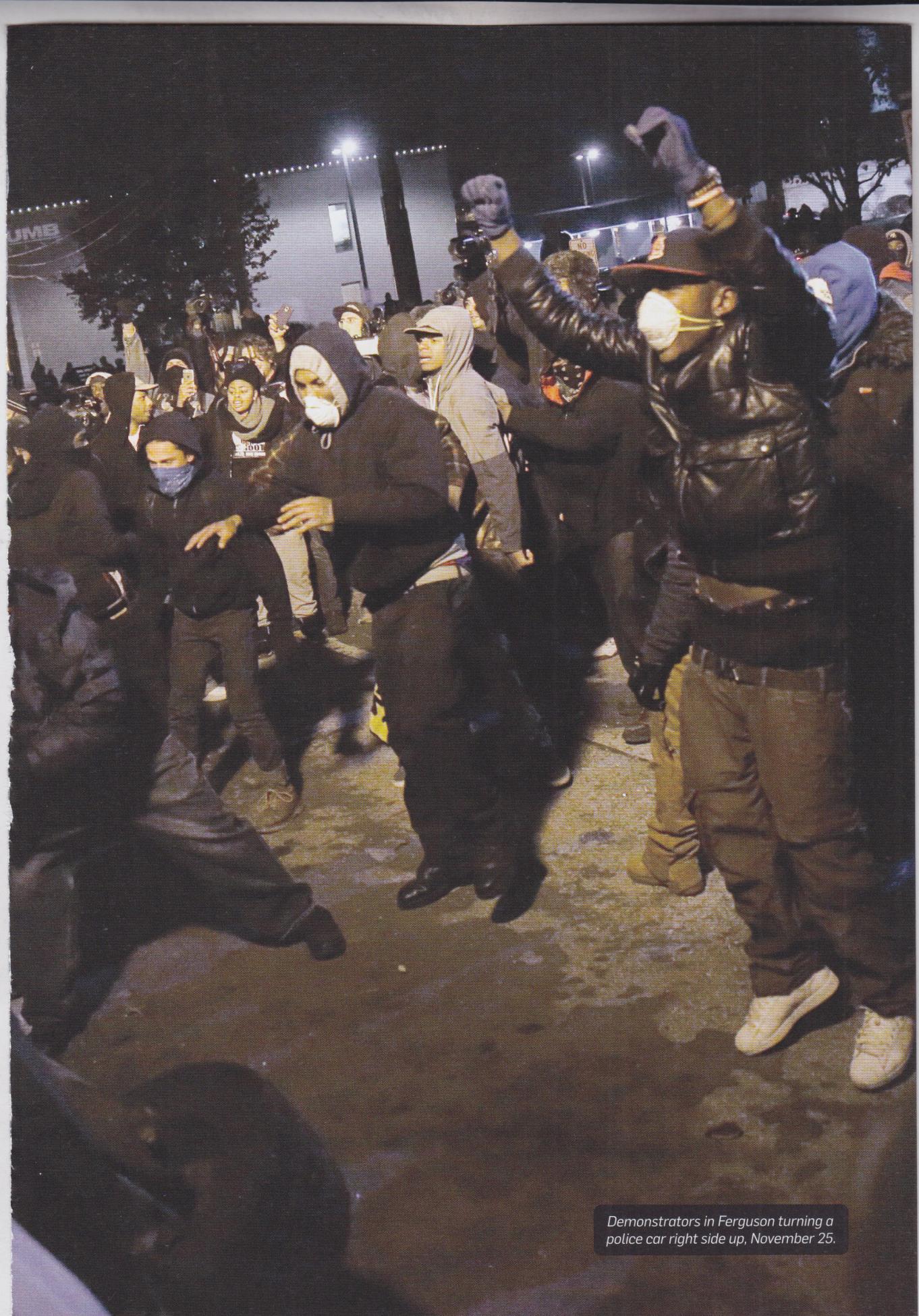


*Protesters in Ferguson wait for the announcement from the grand jury on November 24.*

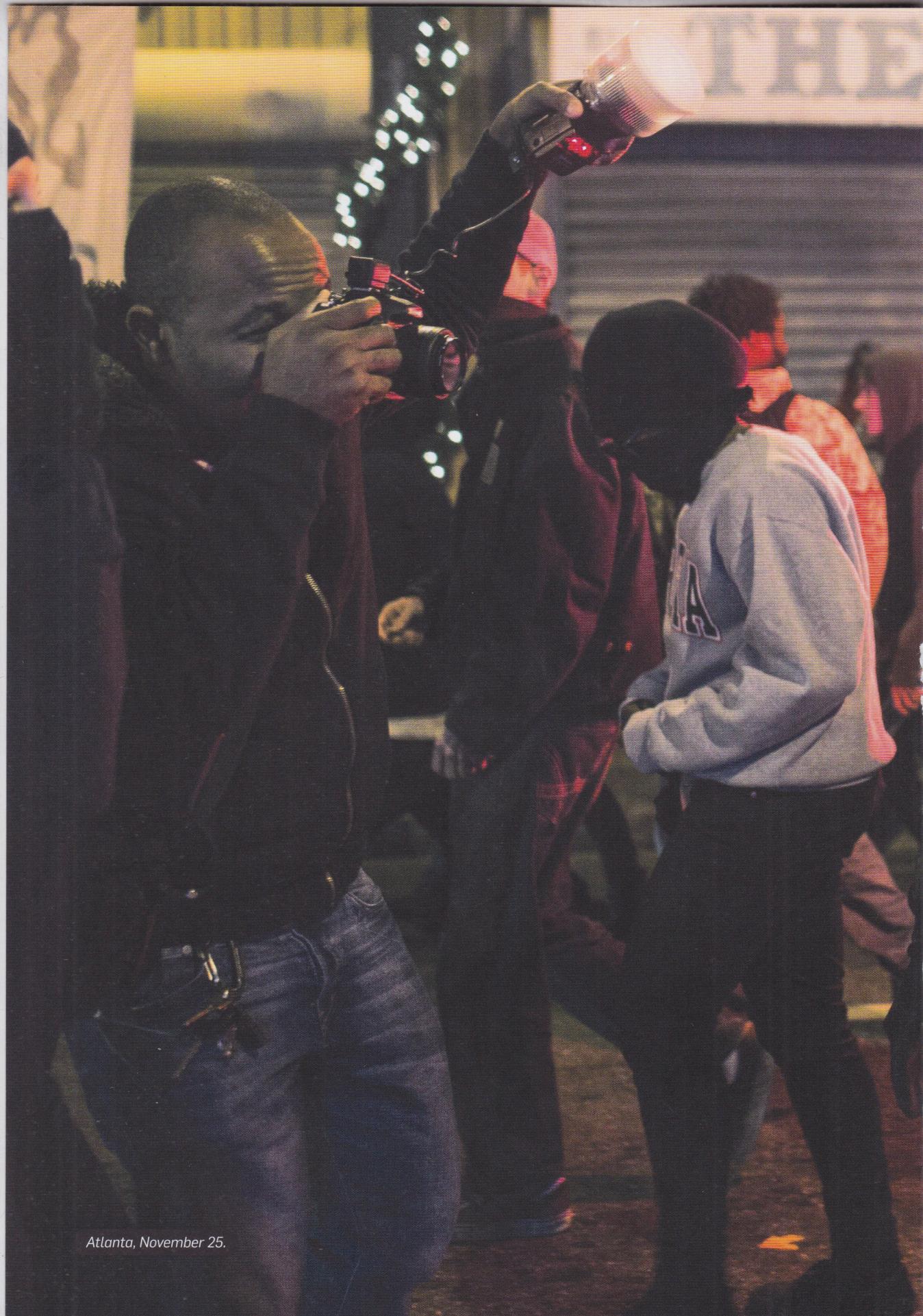
*A protester sprays lighter fluid on a police car as others smash its windows near the Ferguson Police Department after the grand jury decision on November 24.*







*Demonstrators in Ferguson turning a police car right side up, November 25.*



Atlanta, November 25.

BOG TERY

FO  
FL





*Oakland, November 24.*

*Blockading Interstate 80 in Berkeley, December 8.*



"Be safe out here."

"You too. I'll see you around."

Later that night we see the guy who led the charge against my friend.

"That wasn't the time or the place to say something. When I realized who y'all were, I thought about it and I realized we're pretty much on the same page. Whatever differences we have, I'm sure we can work it out. Everything was just really tense the other night... I've been dreaming about this my whole life and I want it to last forever. But we gotta be organized and y'all are organized. Y'all are more ready than anybody."

In some ways we are more ready for this than most people: riot police, chemical weapons, days and nights of marching, becoming anonymous when we need to, fundraising, jail support, coming prepared. In other ways, we're in the rear watching as people of all ages and genders run ahead of us. The collective strategy people have enacted directly on the streets is more intelligent and brave than anything we could come up with in one of our circular, painful meetings.

**AUGUST 15 (FRIDAY)** - The Ferguson Police Department releases surveillance footage of the "robbery" Mike Brown allegedly participated in at Ferguson Market. During the day, the scene on the street is festive. By evening, the mood has shifted as a confrontation unfolds between protesters and police guarding the store. The police use tear gas and flash-bang grenades in an effort to disperse the crowd. Instead of running away, protesters fight back; some shoot into the air. A group of about 100 confronts police lines, throwing bottles and rocks and holding ground against overwhelming numbers of police. Ferguson Market is the epicenter of renewed looting.

**AUGUST 16 (SATURDAY)** - In response to the previous night's looting, Governor Jay Nixon declares a curfew from the hours of midnight to five in the morning. Almost immediately, there is a public call by activists to resist the curfew. The QT quickly fills up with people, eating, giving out water, and talking about what to do next. Although the crowd largely seems intent on resisting the curfew, a few "leaders" from the New Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam successfully scare most people out of staying in the streets past midnight. As the clock hits midnight, the NOI, NBPP and even the activists that put out the call to resist the curfew are nowhere in sight. The only people left, while relatively small in number, are determined and defiant.

Armed with pistols and Molotov cocktails, some of the crowd has assembled under the awning of a boarded up barbecue restaurant and are preparing to attack the police when they advance. Around 45 minutes after midnight, the police begin to slowly clear the streets. When protesters refuse to disperse, the cops fire tear gas and smoke grenades into the crowd. People pick up the gas canisters and throw them back at the advancing police line. Multiple protesters collapse in the street and are carried to relative safety by others. Some people rip up chunks of asphalt from potholes while others grab rocks from storefront landscaping, but they are no match for the heavily armored police vehicles. The crowd is pushed back.

Out of nowhere, a lone police car with its sirens on screams down W. Florissant from the opposite direction of the advancing line of riot cops. In the ensuing panic, protesters run down side streets as gunfire rings out from people posted up underneath the awning. Chaos ensues as the police car loops back and more protesters flee, running straight into the crossfire of the people under the awning and the advancing police line. One protester is hit twice by gunfire, either from police or by friendly fire. He is loaded into a car and rushed to the hospital.

The governor has declared a curfew. No one will be allowed on the streets of Ferguson after midnight.

Of course we're going. "Fuck their curfew."

A local activist group has called for a march to defy the curfew. The rumor is that they want to march out of the boundary and then back in all together in a big crowd. Safety in numbers. Or maybe a trick to lead us all away from the coming conflict. *Leaders betray.*

It's been drizzling for hours. If anyone had any doubts, this confirms it: *God is a counter-revolutionary.*

Black army boots and a suit with silver starred epaulets. The national chairman of the New Black Panther Party is going around the crowd trying to convince everyone to go home. "I will not lead my people into a meat grinder. The art of war tells us that we should choose the time and place we fight, not our enemy. Brothers, we don't have enough guns out here today to defeat the enemy. We don't have enough gas masks or medical supplies. There are women and children here!"

Paternalistic, patriarchal, militaristic... completely out of touch with the mood on the street. And yet some people are buying the fear-monger's wares. Slowly, because of the rain or an exaggerated

threat, the crowd thins. The clock strikes twelve. "Hands up, don't shoot!" "We still here. What you gonna do? Nothin'!" Somehow there are still two hundred of us left in the street. The crowd seems small, too small, compared to the hundreds here just hours before. The cops are keeping their distance, so what do we do? Close the gap.

We march towards the police line. Defiance that just won't quit. Scuffles. Rocks and bottles thrown and then comes the tear gas. Round after round filling the street, choking the air. I run after a spinning canister trying to catch it so I can throw it back. Someone else gets there first.

"Ow, that shit burns!"

"You gotta get some gloves."

I show him my leather work gloves.

"Two dollars from Home Depot."

He nods his head in agreement, appreciation.

I see my friend trying to help up a stranger who has fallen. My respirator in place I run through the clouds of gas to help him.

"Can you stand up? Can you walk? Here, lean on me." I put his arm around my shoulder and carry his weight.

"Watch my back!" I scream to a nearby stranger as we slowly walk away from the approaching police line.

"I got you, keep going."

We're breaking up chunks of asphalt and throwing them at tanks. Others are watching us, getting the idea, joining in. Then for no apparent reason a lone police cruiser, sirens blazing, comes screaming in from behind. Panic everywhere, people running, loud bangs, smoke and tears filling my eyes. Where are my friends? What's happening?

Still frame: a body lying on the ground.

If I was in a movie right now, everything would go quiet for a second or two, the frames clicking by one at a time blurry and out of focus, and then it would all speed up again, the camera framing a shot of my closest friend, fallen, hurt, but unable to tell me what's wrong, what happened. The only sound he can muster: a haunting groan. A crowd forming around us, me yelling for everyone to get back, to give us space, my voice cracking with emotion. A short stocky man with a high-pitched voice, his whole body shaking, gyrating, almost as if he were dancing, is screaming, "He's been shot! He's been shot!" over and over. And then seemingly out of nowhere a car pulls up, my friend is carried in and he's rushed to the hospital, guided there by riot angels I'll never know.

I stare at the spot where he had just been. Rain mingles with small puddles of blood in the dimpled

surface of the sidewalk. A police tank stops at the intersection. "Fuck you, motherfuckers!" as I throw the stone I've been holding. I want to hurt them, to draw the blood that was drawn from my friend. If I can't do that, I'll have to settle for letting their hell fall down on my body. It's nothing I haven't felt before: the sting of rubber bullets ripping into my skin, metal cuffs cutting off the blood flowing to my hands, the relentless fire of pepper spray burning my face, the choking cloud of tear gas condensing in my eyes, the dull thud of a four foot wooden pole on my head.

*Give it your best shot. I can take it.*

*I even kind of like it.*

Perhaps this is the moment in which I lose my fear.



They won't let us all into the hospital. Gun violence, protocol, protective custody. A friend is lying on the sidewalk, unable to go further. Others are walking around aimlessly, in a daze. I'm talking on a cell phone to a drunken friend, trying to explain what's happened.

I see him walk up. A suit and a tie, a badge on his hip.

"So were any of you there? Did you see what happened?"

Without thinking, just wanting him to leave, "Nobody's going to talk to you, just go away."

"Ok, well, I hope your buddy dies up there."

*Shock. Did he really just say that?*

"Get the fuck out of here! Go shoot yourself in the fucking head!"

**AUGUST 17 (SUNDAY)** - Violence breaks out hours before the curfew, in what the media call the worst night of rioting. The past few days have only increased the audacity of the crowds. This time, protesters attempt to march on the police command center located in a nearby strip mall. Some throw Molotov cocktails at the police; gunshots are reported. The police respond with a rain of tear gas and rubber bullets, eventually pushing the crowds back down the street. The looting becomes more dispersed and widespread, with incidents reported in multiple locations miles away from the QT.

After a few hours, it becomes obvious. We have to go back out there. Can't just sit around the house all day rotting inside, letting our sadness turn into paralyzing fear. A friend brings some candles and flowers from our garden. We head for the spot

where he was shot. There's still some police tape tied to the fence. We rip it off and I push it into the mud with my shoe. We light the candles and scatter the flowers. I sit down wondering if anyone walking by will know what happened here, in this exact place, not even twenty-four hours ago.

I want to write something. A paint marker and some toilet paper. *"The only way to heal this pain is to change the world."*

I need to walk around, to feel the crowd surround me, to be covered once again in the warm blanket of an anger that refuses to die.

I see the top cops walking around, so sure of their safety, pressing the flesh. *What do they think they're doing?* "Hey, I just wanted you to know that not everyone here likes you. You know, in case you forgot." I follow them around for a while, looking right at the center of their eyes. And then I'm screaming.

"Hey Johnson, let me get your kidney. I want your kidney."

"Calm down son."

"Don't tell me to calm down. My buddy's in the hospital right now with all kinds of tubes and shit comin' out of his face. He lost his kidney and his spleen. There's a bullet right up in his heart. And that's on you motherfucker. Fuck your curfew. If you hadn't come down here with your tanks and tear gas none of that shit would've happened. I want your fuckin' kidney! If he dies, you're gonna pay."

"Listen, I'm here to protect your right to protest peacefully."

"What do you think I'm doin? Just because I'm getting loud? What're you gonna do? You gonna beat me up? You gonna shoot me? Go ahead. Get the fuck outta here. Are you gonna wait till somebody else gets shot, till somebody else dies before you wake the fuck up."

He's trying to ignore me, talking to the media, trying to appear calm and reasonable in contrast to my out-of-control raw anger.

"I'm gonna get that kidney one way or another."

They don't even touch me. They just walk away and get in their cars, sweating, stinking of fear.

**AUGUST 18 (MONDAY)** - Governor Nixon declares a State of Emergency and calls in the National Guard to protect the police command center. The police announce that they will not allow crowds to assemble and that all protesters will be forced to continue moving along the street or be arrested. The curfew, however, is lifted from the city of Ferguson. Police block off W. Florissant to cars and set up checkpoints at both ends of the strip. Many of the side roads through the neighborhoods that lead down to the

strip are blocked as well. This new police tactic is a blow to protesters who had previously used the side roads to flood onto W. Florissant and escape when things got too hot.

In the afternoon, pop star Nelly arrives on the scene, telling people they have options. Someone in the crowd shouts back "You have options, you're rich!"

As darkness approaches, the crowd swells and people begin to defiantly march in the streets. As a standoff with the police line develops, rocks and bottles fly through the air. Peace marshals link arms in response, forming a line between the march and the police and attempting to push people back off the streets. Despite the efforts of the "peace police," some continue to confront the police throughout the night.

*What does that even mean? State of Emergency. National Guard. Will the army be the new police? Will they have live rounds? What are the rules of engagement for this new situation?*

We're marching again. Up and down the strip, cops blocking off either end. "Stay on the sidewalk." We're in the street. "Stay in the right hand lane." We've taken up both. "Move back towards the sidewalk." We take over the whole street. Every passing car is simply a part of the demo. "If you scared go to church." "No justice, No sleep!" There's a thin police line ahead but we go right through it and they don't lift a finger. That's how afraid they are of another confrontation, another spark. It's clear they've been ordered to stand down.

We're back at the other end. This time they've made a line we won't be marching through. They don't want a replay of the night before. But wait, they've brought help. Fifty preachers and liberal do-gooders, the "peace keepers" link arms and walk toward us with their backs to the police. Non-violent resistance now means doing the job of the police for them, weaponlessly.



Back at Canfield, there's a crowd around two or three police tanks. The cops are all wearing fatigues, helmets and body armor. They've got pepper ball guns, beanbag and wooden dowel shotguns, AR 15's, tear gas launchers, sniper rifles, tazers.

A woman has ripped up a "Do Not Enter" sign and is holding it up in the middle of the street. She's all alone. Every once in a while, she drops the sign and goes back into the crowd to check on her baby.

The police, through their loudspeaker, are telling



*Demonstrators blockading the streets of Ferguson on August 18.*

us not to do everything we're doing. Even when we comply, they threaten us.

"If you are ripping out a street sign you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are standing in the QuikTrip lot you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are carrying a street sign that you have illegally removed you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are standing still you may be subject to arrest or other measures..."

The lone woman comes back into the street with her large metal sign. One by one people drag out traffic cones to symbolically block the way. A few dumpster lids are propped up between them, creating a flimsy defense against rubber bullets. The street slowly fills with people.

Ten, fifteen, twenty tear gas canisters fly through the sky. They've also brought flash-bang grenades and smoke bombs. This time, everyone is throwing them back. Rocks are flying through the air. It's still not enough, but at least people are learning to work together, to throw in waves.

An armored car approaches and we run down Canfield back to the safety of a neighborhood the police have yet to invade. Shots ring out. "If you

gonna shoot, shoot straight!" The tear gas is thick tonight and we take a minute to wash our faces in the spigot of a house just down the block.

Some kids next to us light a Molotov and either out of excitement or nerves drop it in the middle of the street. "You've got to run up before you throw that." Everyone is laughing, teasing the youth for his lack of experience in something we're all still novices at.

"Make this one count!" Someone runs up to the window of a nearby building, breaks the glass and tosses in a Molotov. The small crowd cheers to the sight of reflected flames. Someone else runs up with a bottle of gas and dumps more fuel on the fire.

Some trash is added to the small fire burning in the street in hopes that it will disperse the low-hanging clouds of gas.

Another armored car speeds in and we run away. At least for tonight, we've had enough. Back home, we're giddy with the knowledge that this rebellion has been going strong for ten days and nights. Despite the overwhelming show of military force, despite the recuperators and their longer leashes, despite the good cops and their bigger cages, the rebels on the streets refuse to back down.

**AUGUST 19 (TUESDAY)** - Shortly after noon, police kill Kajieme Powell a couple miles away from Ferguson in North St. Louis. An angry crowd gathers.

Meanwhile, for the first time in over a week, police and their political counterparts succeed in imposing order on W. Florissant. Despite an intimidating police presence, people continue to march up and down the street. Members of the Nation of Islam, church leaders, and liberal activists urge, shout, and push people onto the sidewalks and away from police lines. Some small conflicts erupt, but nothing gets out of control.

**SEPTEMBER 10** - Organizers call for a shut down of I-70 in solidarity with Michael Brown and to put pressure on the prosecutor to indict Darren Wilson. Police respond with an overwhelming show of force, deploying roughly 300 officers. Protesters gather in the street and boldly march towards the police line. The police succeed in stopping protesters from reaching the highway, but are unable to calm the crowd, some of whom throw bricks and bottles at them. Police make a few arrests but fail to catch some of the culprits, who escape into the surrounding neighborhood.

**SEPTEMBER 23** - Mike Brown's memorial is burned in the early morning. Residents blame police or white supremacists. Throughout the day, supporters rebuild the memorial, while tension builds as word spreads. When night falls, the streets fill once again, this time without the presence of "peacekeepers." Police are met with bottles and rocks as they push people off the streets and into the neighborhood. After a brief standoff on Canfield Drive, which the police are still too scared to enter during protests, shots ring out. The next morning, two high-ranking officers complain of having to dive behind cruisers to avoid being hit.

**SEPTEMBER 28** - A large crowd of protesters throws bottles and rocks at officers outside of the Ferguson Police Department.

**OCTOBER 2** - Police evict a protest encampment that had been occupying an empty lot in protest of Mike Brown's killing.

**OCTOBER 4** - Protesters briefly disrupt the St. Louis symphony, singing "Which side are you on?"

**OCTOBER 8** - Just before dusk, a white off-duty police officer moonlighting as a security guard in a wealthy St. Louis neighborhood shoots and kills 18-year-old

Vonderrit Myers. Within a few hours, hundreds have gathered at the intersection. Police spout off the usual story that the kid had a gun and shot first. But many witnesses and friends claim the "gun" was actually a sandwich Vonderrit had just purchased. The crowd's anger grows and people begin to surround the nervous police officers, shouting at them. The police, realizing they are outnumbered and that the situation is beginning to be unsafe, try to leave in their cruisers. People surround the cars, smashing out taillights and the window of a detective's car as he drives off.

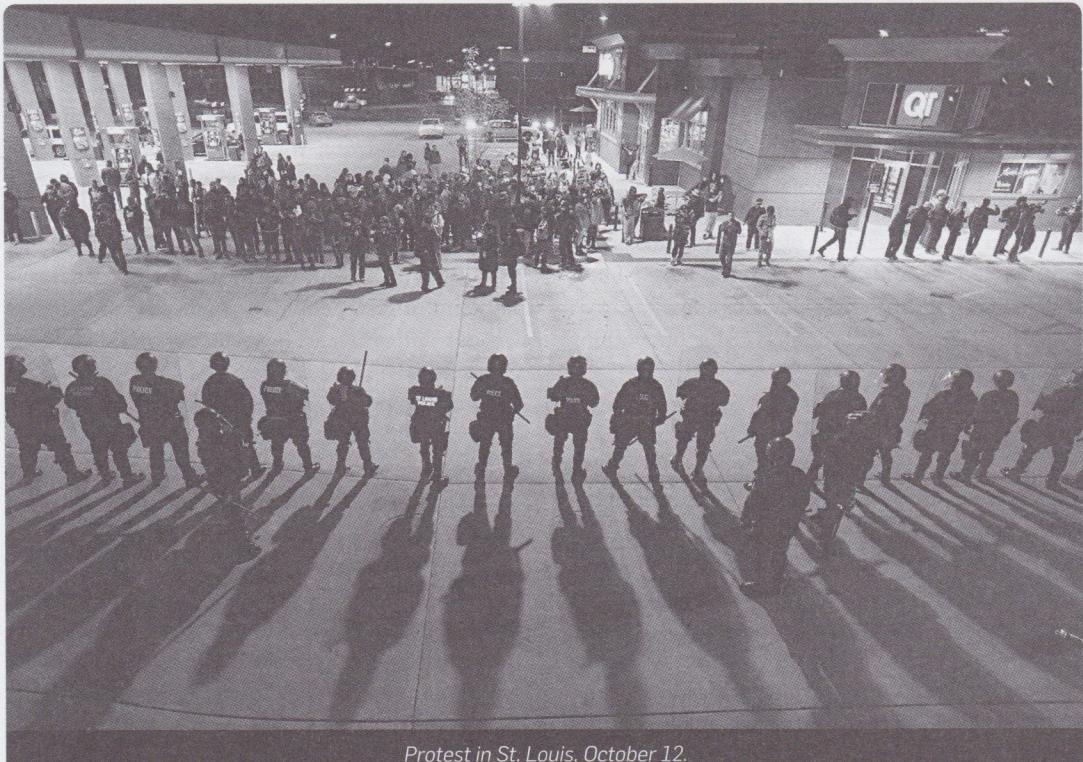
After the police withdraw, protesters take the street and block traffic on the major boulevard, Grand. A few more minor scuffles occur. Police are attacked whenever they approach the march; instead of calling in backup, they withdraw. The city is clearly afraid of having a "Ferguson" on their hands.

**OCTOBER 9** - Once again, a large crowd gathers at the intersection where Vonderrit Myers was killed. The crowd marches down to South Grand and proceeds to shut down the on-ramp and exits for highway I-44 for close to an hour. The police keep a safe distance, hoping to deescalate the situation. Eventually, the crowd starts to march down Flora Place, after one woman points out that it is the wealthy residents of that street that pay for the private security who killed Myers.

As the crowd approaches Flora Place, people bang on cars, scream at the residents, and blare air horns. Protesters steal American flags off of front porches and a few houses have bricks thrown through their windows. The crowd gathers in an intersection and burns the collected flags, then marches back to the main street. When protesters reach the main intersection, three cops boldly run into the crowd. The officers are immediately surrounded and shoved out. Within minutes, roughly 100 officers flood the area to rescue the three, spraying the crowd with mace. Brief scuffles follow, but the crowd is mostly dispersed.

Someone pushes her head in the window of a cop car. "See this face?" she screams at the driver. "Every time you put your fucking finger on that trigger know this face is gonna be there. Every god damn time, this is what we're gonna do."

Afterwards, the media repeats the usual line of "a peaceful protest turned violent." But from the moment the group left the vigil, it was rowdy and militant. There was no "turning" at any point for this group, nor a small group whose actions stood out from the broader group.



*Protest in St. Louis, October 12.*

**OCTOBER 12-14** - Activists called for this to be a weekend of disruption in solidarity with Mike Brown and to push for an indictment against Darren Wilson. During the day, protesters disrupt various sites and events, including political campaign rallies, the Rams game, and Wal-Marts. At night, people gather outside the Ferguson Police Department. The weekend, while “peaceful,” achieves its goal of interrupting the normal flow of life in St. Louis and returning nationwide media attention to the case. Over the following month, suspense builds as a Grand Jury prepares to announce whether to indict Darren Wilson for killing Michael Brown.

**NOVEMBER 17** - As the Grand Jury continues to deliberate, Governor Jay Nixon declares a State of Emergency. National Guard troops move in to guard 43 locations around Ferguson including electrical substations, police stations, shopping malls, and government facilities. An eerie tension descends on the city as residents await the verdict and National Guardsmen roam the streets in armored cars.

All around the country, the authorities have been scrambling to prepare for the impending storm. Some are trying to make agreements with protest leaders, in hopes of isolating troublemakers. Others emphasize that the protests will be dramatic and disruptive, no longer trying to preserve the illusion

of social peace. Corporate media widely reports an announcement from the FBI that “extremists” will likely attack police officers and other targets.

**NOVEMBER 20** - 28-year-old Akai Gurley is “accidentally” shot and killed by the police in Brooklyn in the stairwell of the apartment where he lived.

**NOVEMBER 22** - Police murder Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, in Cleveland, OH, firing the fatal shots within two seconds of arriving on the scene and refusing to provide first aid to the child. This makes national news—not because it is more egregious than other police murders, but because of the attention already focused on the issue.

**NOVEMBER 23** - Protesters gather where Vonderrit Myers was killed and march through south St. Louis, disrupting traffic throughout the city. A website lists scores of gathering points around the US for protests responding to the forthcoming Grand Jury announcement.

**NOVEMBER 24** - Hundreds gather outside the Ferguson Police Station, awaiting the announcement. People huddle around cars and stereos listening to live news broadcasts. When it is announced that Darren Wilson will not be indicted, the crowd rushes



Protesters block the I-75/85 connector in Atlanta on October 22. Covered by national press, this was an image of things to come.

the police station, shoving down the crash barriers surrounding it. Mike Brown's stepfather is recorded screaming, "Burn this bitch down!" Later, the police threaten to charge him with "Inciting a Riot" if he doesn't apologize for this. Within the hour, the crowd has started to attack police and break the windows of buildings surrounding the police station. Protesters surround the riot cops and armored trucks, throwing rocks and bottles at them as they hide behind their shields. A crowd rushes an abandoned police cruiser, damaging it and attempting to flip it over. Police fire tear gas, then fall back as gunshots are fired from the crowd. With the police retreating, the crowd starts to loot and set fires. Two police cruisers are completely burned.

On West Florissant, hundreds of people take over the street. People are openly looting as police watch helplessly from a few hundred yards away. By the end of the night, two dozen structural fires have been set and many cars at a dealership have been completely torched. Gunshots ring out all night through the smoke and flames. Interstate 44 is shut down by hundreds of protesters.

On South Grand, people riot through the bar district, smashing out windows and looting various stores. A few protesters try to stop the crowds from looting businesses, mostly without success. Eventually, police overpower the crowd with armored

trucks and tear gas and disperse protesters into the surrounding neighborhood.

Elsewhere in Ferguson, there are apparent reprisals, as the church Michael Brown's father attends is burned and the body of another young black man, 20-year-old DeAndre Joshua, is found near the location of Michael Brown's death. He has been shot in the head and then burned.

Meanwhile, solidarity actions explode around the country. Tens of thousands of protesters converge in New York, shutting down all three bridges into Manhattan; the Police Commissioner is splattered with fake blood at a demonstration in Times Square. Protesters shut down highways 10 and 110 in Los Angeles and Interstate 5 in Seattle. In Oakland, over 2500 meet downtown and block highway 580 for hours. Then the crowd marches back downtown to the police station, where clashes erupt on Broadway. Participants erect burning barricades and loot several corporate stores, including a Starbucks and Smart & Final grocery store. Dozens are arrested.

We are gathered in downtown Ferguson. The moment comes for the prosecutor to read the verdict. Someone has rigged up a PA system to broadcast the speech. He's cutting in and out. I can barely hear it.

I see people shaking their heads. The verdict is clear: no indictment. Word is spreading through the



Demonstrators loot a business in Ferguson on the night of November 24.

crowd and folks start to yell at the police line guarding the station. Some throw things at them. I hear later that the first thing thrown was a bullhorn, which has all sorts of meaning if you think about it. *We yelled at you for too long, this thing has proved useless! The time for talk is over!* At this point, there are only ten or so riot police around. Some of them start to back away frantically, almost tripping over each other.

A woman comes through the crowd sobbing. I try to comfort her and she tells me, "We're so far from ever getting any justice! Why?" We hug and another woman comes up to hold her. I let go just as CNN comes over to record this moment. I get in front of the camera and yell at them for being vultures, for not letting this woman have this moment alone. They eventually leave. Antagonism towards the media is pretty strong. Earlier in the night some media were robbed and others threatened with violence.

Suddenly, gunshots ring out and people surge in that direction. Windows start breaking all around. Some peace police are trying really hard to guard the businesses, but failing.

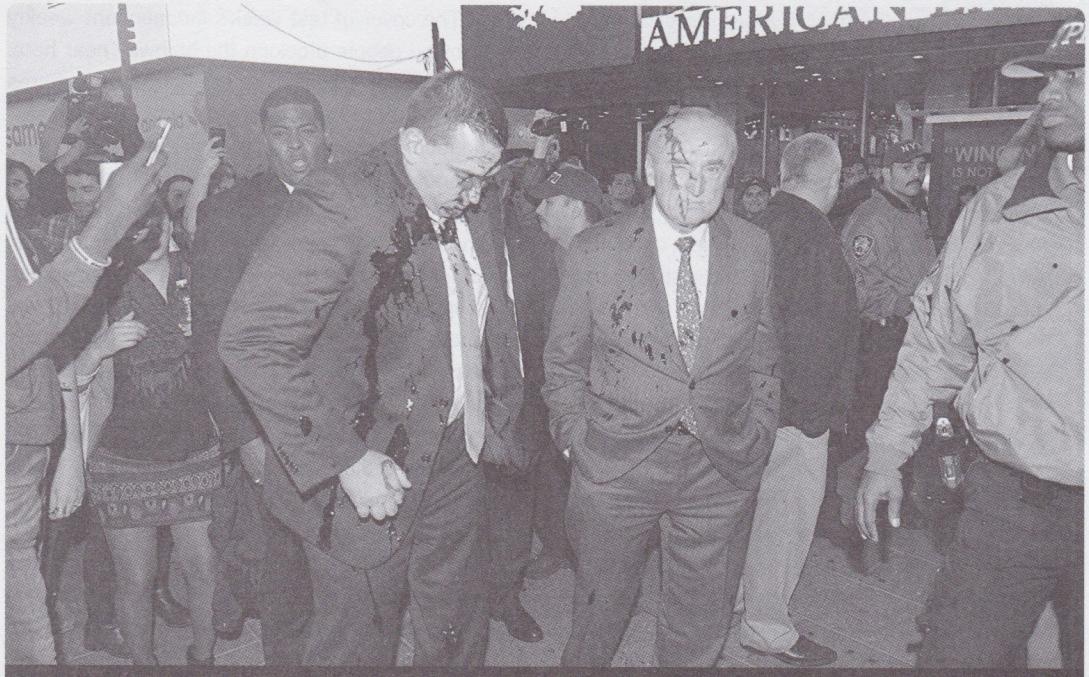
Meanwhile, a large part of the crowd is marching to a formation of riot police down the street to confront

them. People start to bust up blocks of paving stones, concrete, and anything they can find to throw. The sound of rocks hitting riot shields is ubiquitous.

A cop car is parked about fifteen feet in front of the line of cops, where most of the crowd is. Folks start to trash it. Windows are smashed and anything loose in the car is grabbed. I heard later that someone popped the trunk and got an AR-15 out of it. No one is stopping anyone. Two young black girls are yelling expletives at the police. One of them, embarrassed, says, "Oh, I'm sorry! I don't usually cuss. I go to church every Sunday!" They laugh, pick up rocks, and throw them at the cop car. There are numerous cameras around and they aren't wearing masks. I try to warn them, but they just shrug.

The police yell over the intercom, "PLEASE STOP THROWING ROCKS! YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO ARREST OR OTHER MEASURES! STOP IT NOW!" People start to rock the car to try to flip it. "PLEASE STOP TRYING TO FLIP THE POLICE CAR, OR YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO ARREST! STOP NOW!"

Then they fire tear gas and beanbag rounds. As we run from the gas, I see an older black man asking younger kids if they're leaving.



*The New York City police commissioner, spattered with fake blood in Times Square on November 24.*

"You all leaving already? Or are you just taking a break and gonna go back for more? Yeah, take a break, but don't leave! Keep your strength. Go back for more." Sage advice.

People wait until the tear gas dissipates and come back to throw more rocks at the line. The cop car is totaled. There's nothing left to do except to try and flip the motherfucker again. In response, the police shoot more tear gas, this time a whole lot.

The crowd is dissipating into the neighborhood side streets and the police are advancing towards the police station and firing gas into the side streets. Some folks are looting a BoostMobile store and a few other shops.

My group decides to circle back to the police line where our cars are. We walk through the neighborhood, and someone near us pops off a few shots in the direction of the police, pretty nonchalant. The police fire more gas. We loop back to S. Florissant, where the cop car is now on fire.

It's beautiful. A rare sight. Later, I hear that another cop car behind it got set on fire too.

**NOVEMBER 25** - Governor Nixon has deployed over 2000 National Guardsmen in Missouri. Protesters rally again outside the Ferguson Police Department. The crowd has dwindled significantly since the previous night, but people are still angry and confrontational. The police and National Guard have increased their presence in front of the police

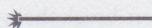
department and are largely able to maintain control, rushing into the crowd and attacking people every time a bottle or rock is thrown.

After a few hours of standing off with the police, the crowd begins to march quickly down the street, leaving the police behind. A few blocks later, protesters round a corner and approach the Ferguson City Hall, which is unguarded with a single empty cop car parked in front. People break the cruiser's windows, attempting to flip it over and set it on fire while others break the windows of City Hall. By the time the police arrive with their armored vehicles and cars, the crowd has moved back towards the main street. A few cruisers have their windows smashed out as the armored vehicles shoot tear gas into the air.

Solidarity actions continue nationwide, in what will add up to more than 170 cities. Thousands march again through Manhattan—taking over Times Square and Wall Street, shutting down an entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel and both sides of the FDR and West Side Highways, and blocking traffic for hours. Protesters block highways and clash with police in Atlanta, Durham, Portland, and many other cities. In Oakland, a small crowd takes over highway 880, then a larger crowd blocks highway 580, ending in nearly 100 arrests. The remaining crowd creates massive burning barricades across Telegraph Avenue to hold back police, looting a series of corporate stores in North Oakland and smashing gentrifying businesses. Another mass arrest occurs near Emeryville at the end of the night.

We're leaving downtown Durham, North Carolina, and I'm looking with caution into the darkness of smaller neighborhoods as our police tail increases. But upon seeing the signs of the Durham Freeway, NC-147, the crowd starts shouting, "1-4-7" over and over. We steer effortlessly onto the on-ramp, no police in front of us. A large piece of construction fencing appears magically to our right, and I help several other masked folks pick it up in stride as we march down the hill. The fencing is too small for a barricade, but maybe it will help to slow traffic so no one gets hit by an aggressive driver.

The fencing gets suddenly heavier; a middle-aged white woman has grabbed onto it, yelling that we need to "be peaceful." I want to tell her that the fence is going to help keep people safer, but instead I just ignore her and keep walking toward the highway. We can argue later—this moment feels crucial and she is a distraction. Unfortunately, the woman refuses to let go and is futilely trying to win a tug-of-war over this little bit of fence. She's pulled along, until another person pulls her hands off the fence. They both trip and fall. Others help her up and make sure she's not hurt, but she's already screaming about being knocked down. I think of all those nonviolence advocates that have been tugged along as they pull backwards, finally to be abandoned to the side of the highway as a struggle explodes beyond their comfort level. Right now, I think that all of us, even those who have dreamt of our cities on fire for years, have been totally surpassed by what we've seen and heard from Ferguson. Honestly, I'm just trying to catch up.



From the sidewalk of a park a block away, I watch three thousand people fill the plaza above Underground Atlanta. Left-wing organizers are leading emotional chants from a small stage. Speakers blasting Public Enemy, a few musical acts, and a series of vehement speeches lend a communitarian, cultural mask to the result of the previous day's private meeting between organizers and law enforcement: a four-hour rally with no plans to march.

Two hours later, I'm departing from the park with sixty others, tinny music playing on a sound cart. I'm shouting through a t-shirt tied around my face. Nearly half of the crowd joins as we march past, splitting the static rally in two. Tensions are emerging that will intensify as the night goes on. On one side, lit road flares, knocked over trashcans, and homemade masks; on the other, cleanup crews and indignation.

The cover of last week's independent weekly showed people blocking the highway near here; we head for it again. The red light of road flares reflects off the concrete walls, matching the tail-lights of oncoming traffic on the Interstate 75/85 connector. Within moments, six lanes of traffic are at a complete halt in front of nearly 250 of us. I hear shouts from the other side of the interstate. Glancing back, I realize that half the crowd has stopped in the on-ramp: a protester is face down, one shoe off, a cop's knee in his back. Rocks start to fly, but we're disorganized and it takes too long to make our way to the nearest off-ramp. As we crest the hill, I see a cruiser drive away with an arrestee behind a smashed windshield.

There are about 80 of us still going. We dip right, my shoulder a little too close to one of the many motorcycle cops at the bottom of the hill. Nearly all of us flood the CSX train yard, filling jackets and packs with stones. A block later, young people are shouting the names of their sets and cliques as we chuck rocks at police officers, cruisers, storefronts, and parked cars. I see one cop fall to the ground, hit in the face by a flying stone, taking a second officer with him.

A bridge ahead: at once the gateway back to downtown and the easiest place to get kettled. We're in before the realization hits the whole crowd—a line of riot police in front of us, a line of cruisers at the back. I'm certain we're getting arrested as the banner holders at the front press forward. Yet, at what must be a command from some higher authority, the riot police scramble to part before us.

Two hours after the march began, we pass the plaza where we started. There are still nearly 300 people at the rally; this time, all of them join the march. As the composition of the crowd changes, the shape of the march shifts: the new participants drag behind, creating a physical gulf between the front and the back. In the front, my mask enables me to blend with a mix protestors, young college students, gang members, graffiti writers, parents, white east side hipsters, black and brown streetwear partiers, middle-aged radicals, and other angry people. The back seems to be more reactionary: upwardly mobile students, private school alumni, left-wing activists. A masked demonstrator leaps atop a parked taxicab, smashing in its front and back windshields: cheers from the front, boos from the back.

Young people are rushing into stores ahead, screaming that if they don't close for the night, they'll be attacked and looted. Several oblige as construction equipment, trashcans, newspaper



*Oakland, November 25.*

boxes, and a decorative display of Christmas trees are overturned and dragged into Peachtree Street. I'm keeping count in case the news crews don't: a window each out of Meehan's Irish Pub, Wells Fargo, and a vacant storefront.

Clad in a Morehouse jacket—an all-black private school on the city's west side—a protestor rushes from the back of the crowd to start swinging on a vandal. His blows are interrupted by another black man, screaming "If you fuck with my bloods, you're gonna get killed." I'm shocked, but not as much as he is; fifteen people surround him and another demonstrator knocks him out flat.

Two blocks up, a hundred riot police block the road. We're being pushed to the sidewalk as more than twenty demonstrators are snatched at random. As we're forced to retreat south down Peachtree, I see the remains of the banner from the front of the march, now burning.



Oakland, California. I was grabbing a quick dinner when I started getting texts that the 880 highway had been blocked. After the insanity of the previous evening's demonstrations, I was reluctant to get back out on the streets. But the frantic texts started multiplying. I met up with some friends and we drove around the edges of downtown, trying to find the march by following the spotlights of the police helicopters.

The crowd is roughly 1000 people. After successfully blocking the 880, they're facing off with a line of California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers who are preventing them from taking another onramp. A moment of confusion; people are yelling out suggestions for what to do next. Someone tries to do a mic check, hearkening back to Occupy. They're completely ignored.

The crowd pushes ahead into uptown and onto Telegraph Avenue, leaving the onramp behind. A group of young people—mostly black and brown, mostly hooded and masked—has taken the initiative, and the crowd is following. Cars honk in support; spectators cheer from the sidewalks. A dumpster is pushed into Telegraph and set alight, a preview of things to come.

Suddenly, I understand where we're headed. Up ahead, past 34<sup>th</sup>, the 580 overpass crosses Telegraph. There's no onramp here, just a chain-link fence—and beyond it, a vine-covered hillside ascending to the highway. People knock down the fence and hundreds rush up the embankment in the surreal glare of the police helicopter spotlight.

At the same time, a burning dumpster appears behind the march, and another on a side street. Riot police have been gathering farther back in both those directions, but they're hesitant to advance on the furious and ecstatic crowd. Masked kids are smashing the windows of the Walgreens at the base of the embankment.

The police continue to hold back, so we follow the hundreds that have climbed up onto 580. Multiple highways converge in Oakland near this point, creating a tangle of overpasses and elevated connectors. The section of highway we stand on is completely blocked by the crowd. About thirty feet ahead of us, across a chasm, lies another parallel elevated highway, swarming with riot police and police cars.

An unmasked woman in a button-down shirt is screaming at the police: "How does it feel to know that everyone hates you?" The blue and red lights of the police sirens illuminate her enraged expression. "This time it's not about the economy, it's not about the war, it's about YOU!" A young guy adds, "How does it feel to be losing, you motherfuckers?" We can see the bulky silhouettes of the riot police puffing out their chests and pointing at us, but all they can do is shine their flashlights across the dark chasm in our direction.

Much of the crowd on the highway begins marching east, so we scramble back down the embankment to Telegraph, where around 500 people are still holding the intersection to prevent the growing lines of riot police from cutting off those up on the 580. An old-school Bay Area anarchist approaches me with concern. "Keep an eye on that truck," she says, pointing to a big expensive-looking pickup speeding off into the darkness down a side street. "They just tried to run down those kids building barricades."

The march has now split. Roughly half the crowd is continuing east on the elevated highway. Within the hour, many of them will be mass-arrested. Our half of the crowd starts to push north up Telegraph as the riot police slowly advance behind us. As we march under the overpass, a thunderous boom echoes through the crowd, followed by a moment of frightened silence and then cheering. Someone in the crowd has come prepared with some intense firecrackers.

The California Highway Patrol is out in full force, with officers decked head to toe in tactical gear guarding their outpost just beyond the overpass. A tense silence falls on the marching crowd for the duration of the block. When the last of us arrive at the next major intersection at MacArthur, the riot police begin to move in behind us. A startling explosion punctuates the night and cheers rise from the crowd. From the top of the small mound at the

corner of the intersection, I see a puff of smoke rise from the police lines and the CHP officers in that section of their line stumbling backwards. Another explosion next to advancing CHP cruisers on MacArthur inspires more cheering and chanting.

A squad car in the intersection that has been partly surrounded by the crowd begins accelerating in an attempt to escape. Someone completely masked up runs over and starts taking out its windows with a hammer. Police surge into the crowd and fistfights erupt. The masked person is tackled; batons swing to keep the crowd back. Dozens of riot police charge up Telegraph towards us as we once again continue north.

I've seen many demonstrations and riots in this city over the years. But I've never seen something like this traverse multiple neighborhoods in one evening, employing so many different tactics and forms in quick succession. It's as if we've crossed some kind of line. We're back again, finally, in that magical and euphoric uncertainty where everything suddenly seems possible.

A massive wall of fire rises across Telegraph at the back of the march. A strange mix of neighbors and participants hold their phones up to snap photos of the eight-foot-tall flames stretching across the wide street, while others put the final touches on the burning barricade: a last dumpster here, another recycling bin there. Some people are staring into the flames; I hear others saying prayers. A second massive burning barricade is already shining half a block ahead. This one has been artfully constructed out of materials from the nearby MacArthur BART transit village development. We hurry to join back up with the main section of the crowd.

Standing in the intersection of Telegraph and 40<sup>th</sup>, the gateway to the increasingly posh and gentrified Temescal district, I no longer see the lines of riot police behind us. Only fire.

The crews that came for looting see their opening. Sounds of shattering glass and cheers draw my attention first to the Subway up on the left, then to the BMW and Audi dealership across the street on the right. In both cases, lockboxes and cash registers are carried off into the night. I look through the broken glass into the car dealership. Young people are jumping on all the cars on the showroom floor to the sound of the high-pitched burglar alarm. The crowd is still hundreds deep. Next to go is the corporate paint store. Expropriated full cans of paint fly through the windows of a pretentious new coffee shop, exploding white paint inside.

Suddenly that pickup truck is on us, revving its engine as it tears through the crowd, barely missing several people. It flips a U-turn down the street and accelerates towards us for a second pass. People around me are screaming as we scramble to get out of its path. Someone with great aim smashes out one of the truck's windows with a rock as it passes. It screeches to a halt, the doors fly open, and two big men jump out, pointing in the direction of the rock thrower. Another woman sitting in the back seat does not get out. An argument breaks out between the men and the closest protesters. As an angry woman turns to walk away from the men, one of them punches her in the back of the head, knocking her to the ground. The crowd instantly swarms the two men. They lie unconscious beside their truck as we continue north.

A T-Mobile store is thoroughly gutted; the looting continues to escalate. Things are starting to blur together; it becomes difficult to count the number of stores looted, highways blocked, and confrontations with police and vigilantes. Scenes like these continue in the Bay Area on a near-nightly basis for the next two weeks. Later, as we walk back on side streets towards downtown, where we left the car hours earlier, I see the helicopters circling far off to the west. For us, the night is over; we'll be back tomorrow. For others, the night is just getting started.

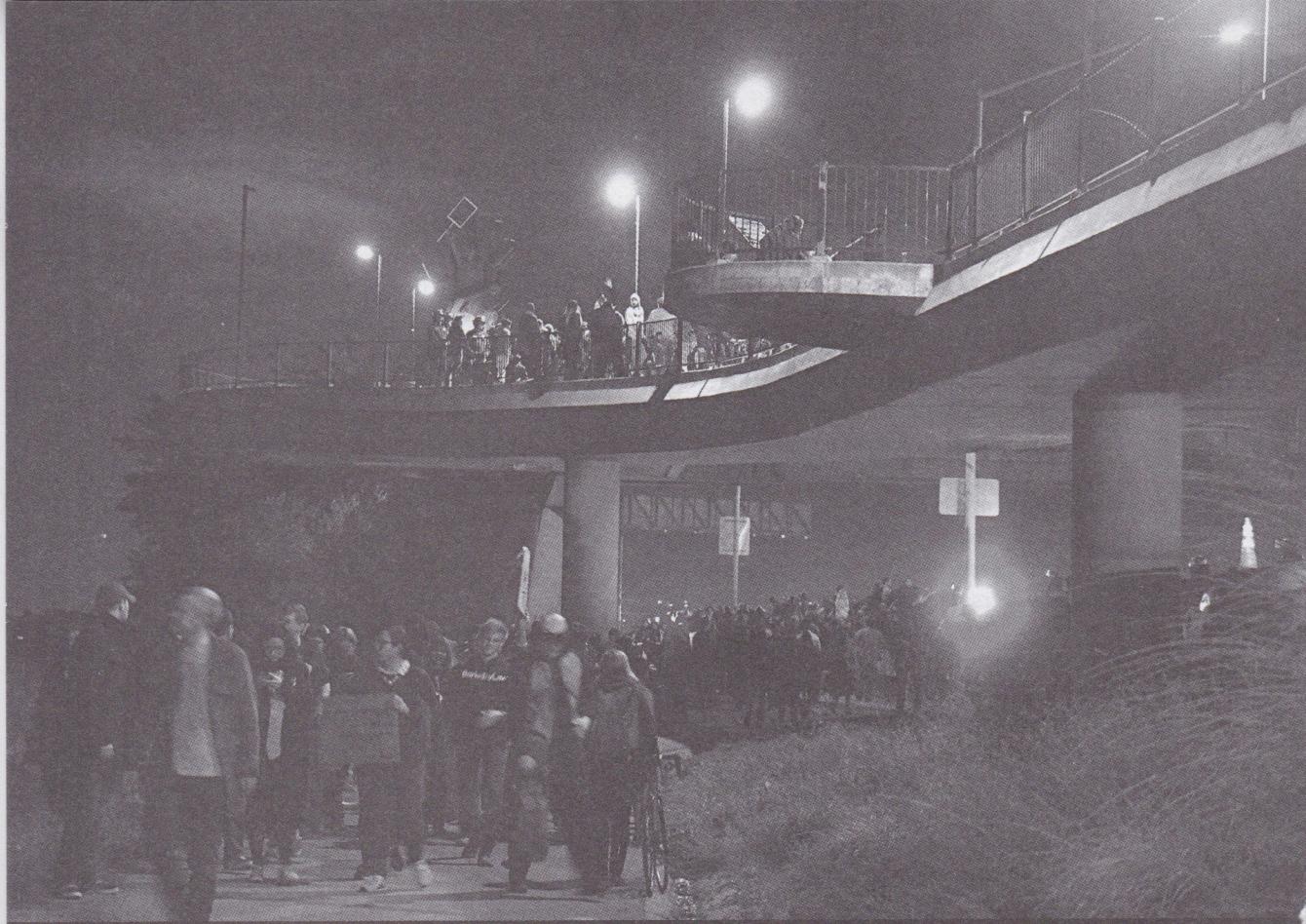
## Then, in the San Francisco Bay Area...

*As momentum plateaued in Ferguson and other parts of the country, it picked up in the Bay Area. Oakland, which hosted the high point of the Occupy Movement in 2011, became the epicenter of two weeks of nightly clashes.*

**NOVEMBER 26** - A destructive march plays cat and mouse with Oakland police in downtown and West Oakland for hours before being dispersed by police. Multiple downtown businesses are damaged.

**NOVEMBER 28** - Black Friday protests interrupt shopping all around the country. In Missouri, crowds of protesters march through the St. Louis, West County, and Frontenac shopping malls, shutting down all three.

In West Oakland, coordinated civil disobedience at the Bay Area Rapid Transit station shuts down all service in and out of San Francisco for over two hours. In San Francisco, nearly 1000 protesters besiege the shopping district of Union Square, clashing with police and damaging fancy stores. They



*Demonstrators marching in the East Bay, December 8.*

march into the Mission district, looting stores and smashing banks. The night ends in a mass arrest of the dwindling crowd.

**DECEMBER 3** - A New York grand jury refuses to indict the police officers who choked Eric Garner to death in July. Solidarity demonstrations adopt his last words, "I can't breathe." Crowds block Market Street in San Francisco. In Oakland, a march weaves through downtown; riot police prevent it from reaching OPD headquarters. Instead, participants march through the wealthy Piedmont neighborhood.

**DECEMBER 4** - Another march weaves through Downtown Oakland, eventually heading east towards the Fruitvale district, where there is a showdown with Oakland police and a mass arrest. In San Francisco, a die-in blocks Market Street for a second night. In Minneapolis, demonstrators march three miles on Interstate 35W.

**DECEMBER 5** - Hundreds march through downtown Oakland, holding a noise demonstration in front of the jail to support arrestees. The crowd moves on to

take over the 880 freeway before being pushed off by police. Next, the march surrounds the West Oakland BART station and destroys the gates protecting the riot police inside. The station is shut down for an hour before the march moves back downtown for more property destruction, clashes with police, and arrests. In Durham, another march hundreds strong blocks the highway and clashes with police.

**DECEMBER 6** - A march originating near the University of California at Berkeley campus clashes with Berkeley police near their headquarters and loots multiple stores, including a Trader Joe's and Radio Shack. The crowds grow as students join in. In response, police departments from across the region pour into central Berkeley, firing dozens of rounds of tear gas and physically attacking demonstrators and bystanders, inflicting serious injuries.

**DECEMBER 7** - On Sunday night, another march starts in Berkeley and moves into North Oakland to clash with police, destroy multiple California Highway Patrol (CHP) cruisers, and take over Highway 24. CHP officers use tear gas and rubber bullets to



*Undercover officer pulling a gun on the crowd in Oakland, December 10.*

push back the crowd. People respond with rocks and fireworks, then march back into downtown Berkeley, destroying bank façades and ATMs. They attack cell phone and electronics stores, culminating with the looting of Whole Foods. The night ends with hundreds of people gathering around bonfires in the middle of Telegraph, popping bottles of expropriated Prosecco. Police are afraid to engage the crowd, but some participants are snatched in targeted arrests.

**DECEMBER 8** - The third march from Berkeley is by far the largest. Over 2000 people take over Interstate 80, stopping all traffic for two hours, while another segment of the demonstration blocks the train tracks parallel to the freeway. The crowd attempts to march on the Bay Bridge but is pushed back into Emeryville, where over 250 people are arrested.

**DECEMBER 9** - The fourth march from Berkeley sets out once again down Telegraph Avenue into Oakland and shuts down another section of Highway 24 and the MacArthur BART station. Increasingly violent clashes ensue with CHP officers in full riot gear, who fire rubber bullets and beanbag rounds, causing numerous injuries and ultimately pushing the crowd off the freeway. The march then loops through downtown Oakland and makes its way into Emeryville, where a Pak-N-Save grocery store is looted along with a CVS pharmacy and 7-Eleven.

**DECEMBER 10** - Hundreds of Berkeley High School students stage a walkout and rally at city hall. A smaller fifth march from Berkeley makes its way into Oakland, where a T-Mobile store is looted and other corporate stores are attacked. People point out and attack undercover CHP officers, who pull guns on the crowd as they make an arrest.

**DECEMBER 13** - Rallies called by civil rights organizations in New York, Boston, Oakland, Washington, DC, and elsewhere around the country draw tens of thousands—but they also signify the end of the unruly phase of the movement as the old guard of black leaders regain control. Like the People's Climate March in New York two and a half months prior, most of the demonstrations are scripted affairs in which the police need not make arrests, although hundreds manage to take the Brooklyn Bridge after the official protest ends. In Washington, DC, a group of young activists from Ferguson and St. Louis interrupts the scheduled programming to declare that the movement has been hijacked from its confrontational grassroots origins.

**DECEMBER 20** - A gunman shoots and kills two NYPD cops in their patrol car in Bedstuy, Brooklyn. Media and city officials blame the Black Lives Matter protests; NYC Mayor de Blasio calls for a moratorium on demonstrations. NYPD officers respond with a



*The site in Berkeley, Missouri where Antonio Martin was murdered by a police officer.*

sort of strike in which they only make “necessary” arrests, and publicly catcall the mayor for not being supportive enough. This slowdown dramatizes how most arrests are needless, intended only to accrue profits for the government, but it is also a sign that the police are beginning to conceive of their interests as distinct from the power structure they ostensibly serve—a development that sent police into the arms of the fascist Golden Dawn party in Greece. A flood of racist invective on the internet also hints at a possible resurgence of extra-governmental white supremacist activity.

**DECEMBER 23** - Police in Berkeley, Missouri shoot and kill 18-year-old Antonio Martin outside of a Mobil gas station. Police claim the teen pointed a gun at an officer but many witnesses claim otherwise. Within the hour, a crowd of roughly 200 people has gathered around the Mobil, which by now is completely full of police, medical examiners, and forensic teams. After a few hours of being yelled at, the police attempt to snatch a man from the crowd. People instantly rush the officers and a scuffle ensues. Eventually, the police throw flash-bang grenades to clear the area. People respond by throwing bottles and fireworks, then run into the street and attack police cruisers. Some rush across the street and begin to loot the adjacent QuikTrip.

People calmly loot the QT for roughly an hour before a fire is set inside it, causing the police to rush in with assault rifles and extinguish the fire.

**DECEMBER 24** - Protesters in Berkeley, Missouri gather again outside the Mobil gas station to protest the killing of Antonio Martin. This time people march towards the highway and block I-70 for roughly 45 minutes. The crowd retreats to the Mobil after police push people off the highway. People smash out a beauty supply store and begin to loot. Tonight the police are far more prepared and are able to arrest many of the alleged looters.

The next evening, a few dozen protesters in Oakland vandalize businesses and the city’s main Christmas tree; but as in Greece in December 2008, the onset of the Christmas holidays marks the end of the trajectory. Over the following month, St. Louis police murder two more young men of color—23-year-old LeDarius Williams, who had already been shot once by police as a teenager, and 19-year-old Isaac Holmes.

Despite everything that has happened, to this day, the police in the St. Louis area have stuck to their pattern of killing a person every month. If we want a world without police murders, we need a world without police. The struggle continues.

## III. Looking Back

but, as we have done, to move on. In fact, I rarely think about Ferguson as a moment that we should discount and forget, as it remains a powerful

moment of social and political power that I would like to see clearly reflected in the body of our work. This is a time that we are still trying to find

our way, and we are still trying to figure out what we can do to move forward.

It is a time of great uncertainty, but also a time of great hope. It is a time of great loss, but also a time of great

## GROUP REFLECTION ON THE EVENTS ST. LOUIS, FEBRUARY 2015

### *Introduction from the Participants*

When we talk about Ferguson, it's imperative that we recognize that what became a beautiful uprising began with a tragic loss, a brutal murder. The endless list of those killed at the hands of the state in St. Louis and elsewhere stokes our rage and fuels our tears. But like those we saw in the streets of Ferguson, we refuse to turn this profound anger and misery inward on ourselves.

The issue of this rebellion, at the heart, is far from a simple one and therefore the answers to questions posed are far from straightforward. The editors of *Rolling Thunder* put together a compendium of thoughtful and critical questions—analytical and clearly posed from a distance. But because of the nature of our experiences where our lives were ripped open—exposing us to the highest highs and lowest lows—the discussion strayed far from the questions posed. Ultimately, we didn't answer very many of them.

We, who were in the streets together over the course of several months in some of the most intimate and exhilarating moments of our lives, had a meandering discussion. At times, we started with the questions; at other times, the discussion sparked some of our own. We were more drawn to start at the heart—how does it feel to touch the edge of your dreams? How do you possibly return to life the way it was before? Who holds you when you cry?

Because we did cry: from the intense moments of rage, to the unbelievable and unbearable beauty

we witnessed and created. Because we witnessed what often seems untouchable—witnessed the impossible—witnessed some of the hope that dwells in our deepest places, and we cried because we touched the edge of great, great loss. And this brought us to perhaps the most important question of all: after all you've been through, what do you still hope and dream for?

### *Background and Context: "I Was a Lot More Pessimistic before This"*

**LUCA:** [reading] "How did you see the future of the St. Louis area before this and how do you see it now? What are the long-term effects shaping up to be? What new social bodies coalesced around the rebellion and the reaction against it or broke it up?"

**MASIE:** I was a lot more pessimistic about the world and St. Louis before this.

**CAMERON:** I definitely was.

**EMMA:** It was incredible to be going to things that you weren't trying to make happen. It was such a relief.

**LUCA:** Yeah, it seemed like this place was in a malaise, like much of the country, but here particularly because of how this place is. And so it was totally unexpected.

**CAMERON:** I didn't expect this to happen and it was amazing that it happened, but I'm also thinking, is this just the sort of thing that might just happen every twenty years and then we're just back to nothing happening in between? I'm just not sure that it's a thing that will keep happening. Because it happened, like, twenty years ago, in 1992, and police have kept killing people for years and years.

**VERA:** We have to take into account what was happening just locally in St. Louis. Maybe riots like this only happen every twenty years, but things were happening in St. Louis that led up to it. Like the Trayvon march.\*

**LUCA:** Yeah, this is an event on a continuum of events that start way back, before Trayvon Martin and before Oscar Grant, that maybe goes back to the 1992 riots in LA. And how do those things relate to Occupy or the Arab Spring or the popular consciousness of these mass social uprisings? They're interconnected, even though they're not connected in an obvious way.

**CAMERON:** Like, there was one guy at the Trayvon march who was getting pissed because we weren't marching yet. And he was quoting a Tupac song, "We riot, not rally." He kept saying that. When I saw him in Ferguson, I felt that there was definitely some kind of continuum.

**LUCA:** Yeah, and because that rally that happened before the Trayvon Martin march was so official, there were all these senators and church leaders there that later were also connected to Ferguson. Even though that's a completely different population, there was some momentum connected in that way.

**VERA:** They tried to turn over a police car at the Trayvon march...

**LUCA:** Oh, that's right...

**VERA:** ...and didn't know how to do it and people were telling them, "Well, this is how you could do it..."

\* On July 14, 2013, there was a rally in St. Louis in response to George Zimmerman being found not guilty for the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. The rally culminated in 800 or so people marching through downtown St. Louis. Police barricades were moved and pushed through, graffiti was written on the back of moving buses, things were thrown in the streets. It quickly became the most notable anti-police march St. Louis had seen in recent history. This march took the cake until Ferguson, which took the whole bakery. A short article on the march entitled "The Storming of the Bastille" can be found at the dialectical-delinquents.com page of Ferguson coverage.

**LUCA:** "And you should be covering your face right now..."

**VERA:** I heard those conversations happening. And then to see what happened in Ferguson... I do think there was a connection there beyond just our friends.

**LUCA:** The other thing about how this related to St. Louis is that this place is really hard to live in, like a lot of shitty cities or rust belt cities in the Midwest. The quality of life here is pretty low. Even though cost of living is pretty low, too.

**MASIE:** Should we list all the ways it's horrible to live here, so people don't feel inclined to move here?

[laughter]

**MASIE:** Air quality, interpersonal violence... it's terrible.

**CAMERON:** The police are... brutal. They're just terrible.

**MASIE:** There's tons of Superfund sites.

**VERA:** So much poverty and crime...

**EMMA:** You cannot swim in clean water.

**LUCA:** The water's not clean that you're drinking either.

**MASIE:** You're at least an hour away from wilderness. At least.

**LOUISE:** It's crazy segregated.

**CAMERON:** Even the wilderness is polluted.

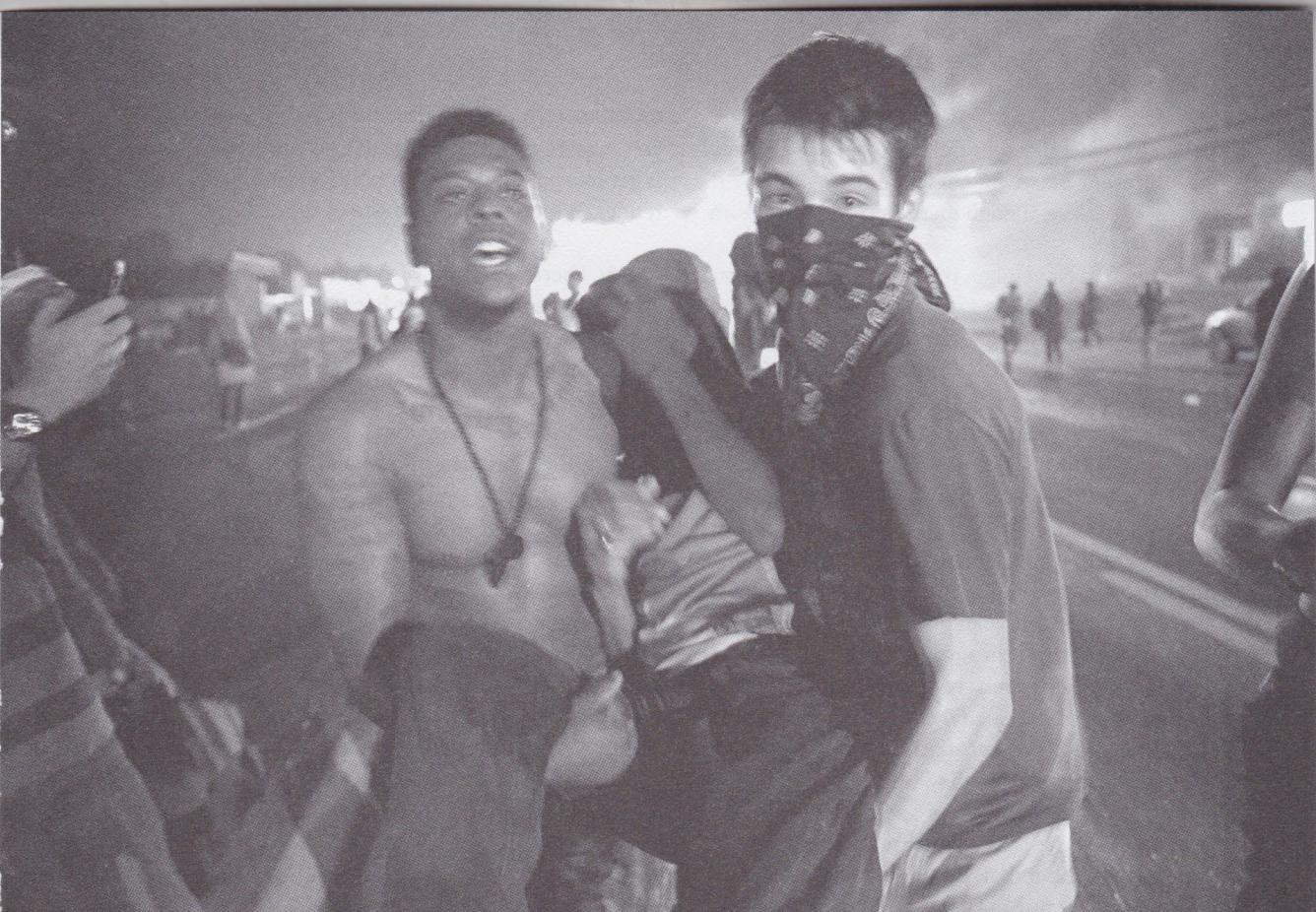
[laughter]

**MASIE:** There's microchips you have to wear when you're here. Microchips under your skin...

[laughter]

### Momentum and Limitations

**EMMA:** Do you think people in general hope that when police keep killing people, people will respond again? Or is it just me? Do you think that there is that momentum? Even though we've seen people both respond and not respond to police murders since Mike Brown's murder?



*Demonstrators in Ferguson carry a comrade overcome by tear gas after the midnight curfew in August 2014.*

**VERA:** I just hope that when it gets warmer that's gonna happen.

**LUCA:** There's also this question of guilt that plays into it, of how people respond if there's a gun involved. The question of whether they think the person killed by the cops is guilty. But even that person on Minnesota<sup>†</sup> who had a gun, people still responded. Anyway, I feel hopeful. I don't expect it, but the possibility feels much greater now that something could happen when the police kill someone.

**EMMA:** And how do you think it will move beyond people responding only when the cops kill someone to responding to confront the shitty conditions of everyday life?

**MASIE:** My hope is—tons of people gathering, being pissed off, spilling onto whatever major street is nearby, maybe confronting police and pushing them out...

**JANE:** ...burning the nearest QuickTrip...

† LeDarius Williams was shot and killed by St. Louis police on Minnesota Avenue in St. Louis city.

**MASIE:** Maybe people could just start doing that when they get an eviction notice or when cost of living is going up or food stamps are being cut. That would be my hope, but I'm not holding my breath for that to happen.

**LUCA:** I think that's one of things about the limitations of the riot. There's this disconnect between people being in the streets together and larger or more nuanced social struggle. How does rioting lead to bigger occupations or general strikes or occupied neighborhoods or completely autonomous zones or neighborhoods where the cops can never go?

Because there are these other entities now. To answer the question of how the social terrain in St. Louis has changed, there are more activists now, these politicized people, and they're still trying to find their way, and there's more socialists and more Black Power nationalists or people involved in trying to get "police oversight."

**CAMERON:** It seems like there's always going to be a disconnect between those people and those who are not organizers. It's gonna happen, but during the months between August and November, I was

like, man, I feel kinda pessimistic that people are not gonna react like they did in August. The energy was different between August and November. It was more passive, though there were flare-ups from time to time.

But then in November, that happened, and I was like, "Oh, there's clearly some division or distinction or separation going on and I'm not even a part of that." I'm not a part of any of those groups of non-organizer/activist people and I'm just as outside of it as the activist groups are. Maybe that also makes it seem like I think there's some fictional group I need to penetrate and join. But I think that's really problematic. There's no inside I can join or a vanguard that meets who are the realest of the real. There's just people, some who are organized in sketchy ways that I can probably never be a part of, some who just show up and fight.

But yeah, there's gonna be activists and organizers doing stuff in response to these killings and I think that's still good. But before this, they were doing the same thing, that is, they were making it their "issue," but maybe with less people. And now it's just another single issue. Sometimes I get depressed when I think about that. But then random shit happens, like the rioting in Ferguson in November. And I see people I don't see at meetings or at the usual organizer protests attacking police.

I ran into some people on November 24 that I had seen in August on some of the crazier nights. They seemed prepared; it was a large group and they were just roving the streets and causing havoc. They seemed to have no interest in being peaceful.

#### *"There Was a Lot of Recruiting Going on"*

**MASIE:** I imagine by asking about "social bodies," though, they wanted to hear about what new people had come out of all this.

**VERA:** Like, there's more socialists in St. Louis now.

**MASIE:** Yeah, there used to be almost no Left in St. Louis.

**LUCA:** And now there's becoming an established Left. It sucks!

**CAMERON:** I was starting to have some real in-depth conversations with this socialist person, and then I realized that he's lobbying to get some alderman elected...

**MASIE:** Goddamn socialists...

**CAMERON:** And I was like, I was really into what you're saying, and now I realize all you want to do is get to a point where your political party is a contender. Which to me is a waste of time.

**VERA:** There was a lot of recruiting going on all around. At some point, it became like a political fair for the different groups.

**LUCA:** Yeah, even that first week, by... was it Thursday [August 14]? When it was just like a street party. With the Christian mimes and all the wingnut preachers showing up...

[laughter]

**TODD:** And there was even that Christian rap circle.

**LUCA:** The prayer circles.

**VERA:** The people who would walk between the riot cops and the crowd just saying "Jesus" over and over again.

[laughter]

**VERA:** But even the RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party]... they were there to recruit people and they did recruit people.

**LUCA:** Oh yeah, they were there so fast.

**CAMERON:** But we were there before them.

[laughter]

**LUCA:** Cuz we live here! They're from Chicago! They had to come from out of town cuz there is no RCP in St. Louis. Well, now there is. Great!

[laughter]

**EMMA:** People who have been arrested since the August and November events... some of us have gone to court for their appearances. And, yeah, the RCP is there, trying to recruit them. When we were there recently, they were trying to get people to come to some phone drive or something.

**VERA:** They were even trying to recruit us. They were like, "What's your website? How can we get in touch with you?" I mean, not that they knew who we were, but... well, they do now.

**MASIE:** It sucks, though, because, say you're not involved in any group, you're not some sort of politico, you've never been involved in any of this stuff before... The way people "get involved" in things is that they become activists or something. So unless anarchists are gonna do the anarchist form of activism, then what do we do? And also, how realistic is it for us to be frustrated with people who go to NGOs, or who go to these socialist organizations? Because it's not as though they know obscure post-left theory or stuff that our friends have thought about and read for a long time.

I understand, too, that those theories come from people's actual experiences of having to deal with this bullshit and being frustrated with it. So there's that hope, maybe people will get disillusioned with activism and get more into the stuff we're interested in. But then, maybe they'll just write off *everything* instead.

**EMMA:** Yeah, it did make me question going to court because... MORE [Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment] is there, and the RCP is there, and I'm wondering, why am I there? Do I really want to stand in line next to these other groups that are trying to recruit this person? I mean, I'm not there because I know them.

So, yeah, it can be disheartening or something... that outside the riot or those moments I didn't really make any friends. So I go to court cuz I hate prisons and I don't want people to be abandoned when they get arrested, but then I don't really know how we should...

**LUCA:** Well, to overgeneralize and to speak as a "we," I think we were really careful the way we moved through things not to be a group, not to be an entity, not to recruit, not to participate in a lot of the formal activist circles that came afterward, not to try to influence this building of the Left in St. Louis.

And that doesn't mean we didn't align ourselves. We aligned ourselves with people in the streets. But we walked away without having long-term relationships with people, because things were just happening in a moment rather than in this structured environment. We avoided that. You know?

In some ways, it was a benefit to us, in terms of not being identifiable too much by the Left... I mean, identifiable to put blame on us individually. But it does mean we haven't thrown our hat in the ring as far as trying to influence this thing that the Left is building. We haven't even been doing the things we normally do; like tabling or handing out newsletters. We've stayed away from that for a lot of great reasons, but at the same time it means we've missed out on

being influential. Often, what anarchists have done in the past is to be the influence. To be like, "Hey shit's fucked up, shit's fucked up." Like pushing... but now we're pushing in a really different way.

**CAMERON:** It also seems like a lot of the Leftist activist groups are in a similar predicament. They're not building. They're bigger, but I don't think they're really blowing up with people. The people still involved are those who have the stamina to deal with being political or being recruited, or being in long meetings.

**EMMA:** I did realize, though, that it sucks that the people that maybe I'll have a real conversation with or build something with... it's cuz they're locked up, and then maybe I'll write them a letter.

**VERA:** Right.

**EMMA:** And then, yeah, it's a less than ideal way to have a conversation with someone.

**MASIE:** There are some anarchists in town who have gone the activist route. And it's interesting because some of them were invited to table at Antonio Martin's funeral, or maybe the dinner afterwards. And that led to one of Antonio Martin's family members reading stuff that we had written and stuff that other people had written about Ferguson, like, critiquing the police. And apparently the cousin was like, "I can't believe white people think this, I can't believe a white person wrote this." So they actually made this worthwhile connection.

**LUCA:** Yeah.

**MASIE:** So I don't know what to do with that.

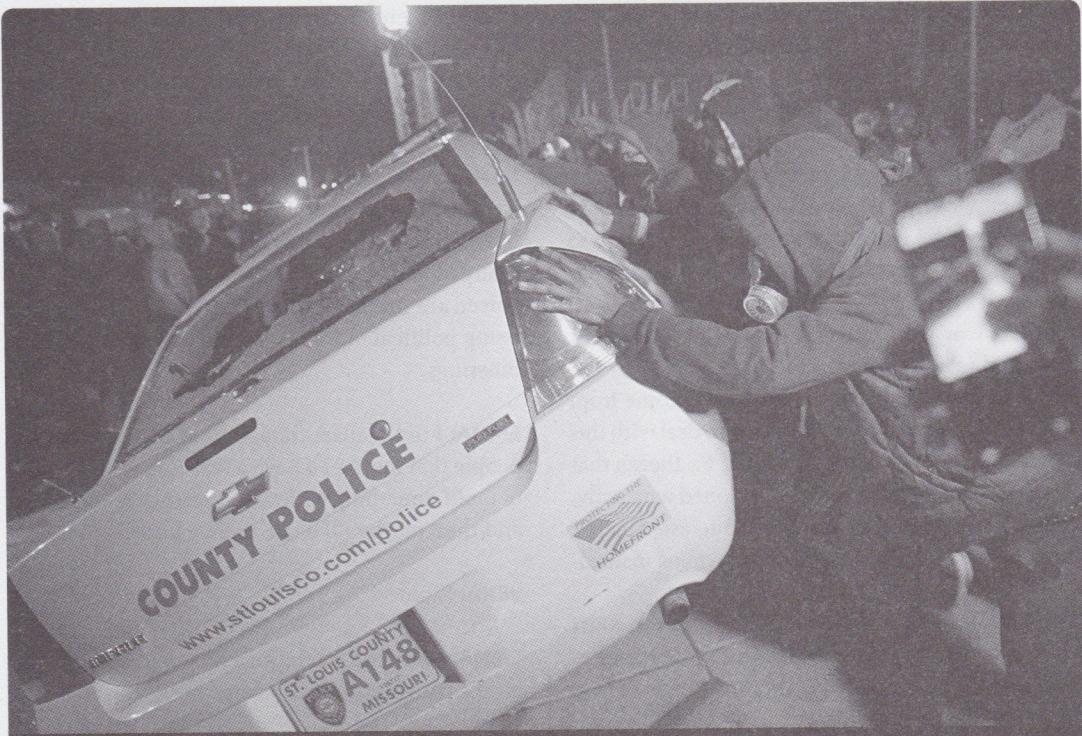
**LUCA:** Well, it's like, how do we do that more? That's always been the question throughout this whole entire struggle, since August. How do we create long-lasting genuine connections?

**MASIE:** And not just be proselytizing.

**LUCA:** And not be trying to get dated....

**VERA:** Get what?

**LUCA:** Dated. "Hey baby..." People were talking about getting people's numbers so they could hang out or be friends. You know how many phone numbers I could have walked away with? But fuck that...



Demonstrators attempting to flip a police car in Ferguson on the night of the grand jury announcement, November 24.

*Pushing the Rebellion:  
"We Don't Just Want a Riot"*

**CAMERON:** My solution to not being a part of the greater Left is to have autonomous events outside of it that are advertised. I mean, I think we're still gonna fall into that no matter what we do. There will still be alienated relationships where we're like "we're the anarchists," or "we have this idea." But I think there are ways to mitigate talking to people like they're recruits.

Another thing, I wish that... I think the most active thing we were able to do is when things were actually happening. When West Florissant was autonomous in some ways. Pushing that further—that's what I think my role is. Making that space more powerful, cuz that's where you actually have some real conversation.

**VERA:** But do you think we could have acted more or done more to continue that? Or could we have, like, been out there before the Leftists, before they started coming in and recruiting people? Could we have pushed the rioting further before they came in?

**LUCA:** I think that one of the things that was coming up for a lot of us was that we got to act not as anarchists. We got to act as part of a larger social force. It was really refreshing not to be the ones to

bring the fight. And so it's interesting to think... do we have any ability to push that further than it went? I don't know. It was a tide unto itself that we got to be a part of.

**EMMA:** People were already pushing it.

**MASIE:** The irony, too, is that what brought all the fucking Leftists, what brought everyone's attention, was the rioting. It was like, we're taking a step away from what people normally do. We've caught the nation's and the world's attention, and so of course all these fucking vultures come in...

**VERA:** And rewrite the story...

**MASIE:** And then... pushing the riot further, what does that mean? Cuz a lot of the more militant sides of the rioting involved guns. Did we actually want more of that?

**CAMERON:** I wasn't saying I wanted to push the riot further, specifically, but to push the situation. The rebellion. It seemed like people were sort of making allusions that this QuickTrip parking lot was the space to be, there was talk of it being dedicated to Mike Brown, but then it got fenced in and it puttered out.

SPAIN '36  
WATTS '65  
PARIS '68  
ITALY '77  
BRIXTON '81  
L.A. '92  
CINCY '01  
CAIRO '11  
FERGUSON '14



- Cash customers please pay in advance or use your QT PUMPSTART CARD.
  - Credit or Debit Card customers insert card, follow instructions on screen.
  - Your bank may place a hold on your account. Contact your bank if this hold is not released within business days.

*Graffiti on the gas pump at the burnt QT in Ferguson, celebrating eight decades of uprisings.*

Si no puede pagar su efectivo liquido en pagar por adelantado, contacte con Tarjeta de Crédito a crédito, retroceda la tarjeta y sigan las instrucciones de la persona. Si la persona no responde hasta \$125.00 Dallas en su cuenta, el siguiente mes se iluminará uno de los días, consulte a su banco.

Even just the murmuring about that space becoming an occupation was spreading. Some of us who maybe are in this room or maybe outside this room had some say in pushing that. It resonated with people.

And another thing, in a more riotous situation, people are gonna be on the front lines. Some of us like to be on the front lines, but also, they've got it covered, so what do we do while they're on the front lines? For example, all these cameras and journalists taking photos of people doing illegal stuff, what do we do with that? How do we make that situation safer?

**LUCA:** Yeah, that's part of the learning experience. Watching it happen and participating for the first couple days and being carried away and not wanting to shape it. And then pausing and being like, oh wait, we don't just want a riot. Something a friend said to me when we were talking about what small ways we might want to influence it, "Remember, what we want is a social revolution."

It helped reframe that in my brain, because I was just watching it go for so long and thinking, "this is just amazing."

But we influenced it even in small ways, like with the addition of graffiti. That resonated. I remember seeing graffiti go up that said "we are ungovernable" and watching people read it back and laughing and nodding. Putting those little seeds of ideas out there, helping feed the fires.

#### *Where It Came from and Why It Was Different*

**LOUISE:** What we were just talking about speaks to the first question. "What made this different from other anti-police struggles that you've witnessed or heard about? Why did it go so far so fast?"

When you talk about it resonating with people, with the most immediate community, like in Canfield\* and the surrounding area... we're talking about people who already know that the cops are an enemy. And have for years and generations. Because of race, because there's so many white cops there and the area's majority black, it's really obvious that they're an enemy.

**MASIE:** My take on police struggles in the past in St. Louis is that they fit into one of two categories. They're either these lone gunman-type attacks

against police, which happen all the time, and then probably once a year or so someone actually kills a cop. Or it's these vigil-type marches or gatherings after someone is killed. Which maybe are meaningful or feel good to people at them, but also maybe it doesn't feel good to be at them cuz they're not that powerful, and outside of that, it doesn't really have a lot of noticeable effects. So, for example, the Scott Perry protests. Every year, the family of Scott Perry, who died in the city jail, protest outside the jail. And that gathering is meaningful, but I feel like outside of that, it's maybe not having a lot of effects.

And then there's all these people who have killed cops, like Cookie Thorton, Todd Shepard, Kevin Johnson. Culturally and sub-culturally, that can have meaning, but in terms of being an actual force that can change things, I feel like there wasn't a whole lot before Ferguson. Or Ferguson was all these different elements coming together and going beyond the limitations of those two things.

**JANE:** As far as it going so far so fast... the first day [August 9] I didn't think it was gonna get too crazy, but I think because of the police response on the second day, that's why people rioted. Cuz there were so many police. I don't think it was gonna get so out of control. People were just gonna march to the police department. I don't think it was gonna turn into a riot, but then people felt trapped and they had that energy.

**LUCA:** So the question is, "Why was this event different than other anti-police struggles, why did it go so much further?" There are all these elements that we can try to put together to answer that question, like seeing this moment on a continuum of social uprisings, extreme repression, warrior culture (which is something that people don't account for too often)... to create the situation where people didn't back down this time. But I'm more excited about the notion that it's linked to all these other moments that create social uprisings, and it's just part of the social condition that we live under that this can happen.

**LUCA:** Yeah, you can't make it happen, nor is it exciting to me to come up with a theory as to why these moments happen.

**EMMA:** Right. Cuz it's uncontrollable...

**TODD:** I don't feel like anarchists should be trying to be political scientists. There's no formula for revolt. It's been happening for as long as we have history.

\* The apartment complex just off West Florissant where Mike Brown was murdered, and the original site of the militant street presence that produced the rebellion.



Graffiti in Ferguson during the uprising supporting Kevin Johnson, on death row since 2007 for the killing of a police officer involved in the death of Kevin's 12-year-old brother, Joseph 'Bam Bam' Long. Kevin is from Meacham Park, a small working-middle class black neighborhood in affluent, white, suburban Kirkwood. Meacham Park was also home of cop killer Charles Lee "Cookie" Thorton, and in 2004 the scene of youth chasing police from the neighborhood with rocks and bottles.

**LUCA:** Yeah, as long as there's repression, oppression, there are gonna be these moments. We're gonna push back, it's part of who we are.

#### Race and Representation

**RAUL:** Should we read another question?

**LUCA:** "Was there a tension between the black insurrectional force that erupted in Ferguson and the construction of blackness as a positive identity within the existing social order that suffused the subsequent national discourse? Have you learned anything about how to engage with the existing forms of oppression without falling prey to repressive strategies of definition?"

[laughter]

**EMMA:** I feel like I have a sense of what they're asking, but...

**LUCA:** Yeah, we have to deconstruct this question before we can answer it.

**CAMERON:** I think they're basically saying, "Was there a tension between this undisciplined force and the positive, respectable black community?"

**LUCA:** I mean, there was this tension between the black insurrectional force and black forces of identity. I think that was playing out with people who wanted to loot versus Nation of Islam people guarding stores, or the woman guarding the Sam's<sup>†</sup> being like, "This is not what we're about."

**VERA:** That phrase keeps coming to my mind too, "This is not what we're about." That kept coming up throughout all of our experiences there, that people would somehow take ownership of what was happening and make it like there was nothing else besides what they were experiencing. Like, how they were experiencing Ferguson was how it was supposed to be. So when someone would throw a rock at the cops, "That's not what we're about."

That's continued through to now. That's consistently the conversation that comes up.

<sup>†</sup> Sam's Meat Market and Liquor on West Florissant Avenue, which was repeatedly looted during the rebellion.



*Demonstrators riding through Ferguson after the grand jury announcement, November 24.*

**EMMA:** So is the answer to the question just “Yes”? Yeah, there was a tension between the peacekeepers who were sometimes black, and the combative black youth.

**TODD:** It’s also that people are trying to represent blackness or people who have faced police violence or young black people or “the black community,” and then there’s also the other side. But on that side, there are people who think that it’s morally wrong to loot or to respond in certain ways, and then there are other groupings of people who are not trying to affirm their identity in any way to represent other people. People who are just trying to riot, to act out their emotions.

**VERA:** And I think it does affect us, because the louder voices of the church leaders or other people who have some amount of power were trying to represent what the “black community” is all about, and we decided not to listen to those voices. We were listening or finding other people, who were maybe involved in the more radical things that were happening. Then we were called out for being racist

or white supremacist, or people targeted us with that language because they said that “We weren’t listening to black people,” by which they meant black people with power.

**LUCA:** Well, it challenges this idea of allyship. Traditional allyship. They say that we should be “listening to black voices,” but to them that means we should be listening to, like, church leaders, people whose ideas we would never align ourselves with under any other circumstances. We’re all the sudden supposed to be listening to those people instead of finding allies we actually have affinity with, who maybe want to fight in the streets. So instead, it calls us into question—“You’re being racist”—instead of allowing for a multiplicity of voices.

**MASIE:** That traditional idea of allyship only makes sense if the only black people in your lives are those community leaders. If you look at black people as not being homogenous, then there is no singular “black voice,” there are all these different black voices, and you can choose who you want to align yourself with.

*“Oh My God, That White Person  
Just Said ‘Fuck the Police’”*

**EMMA:** What is this second part of the question, repressive strategies of definition? Just these... identities?

**CAMERON:** Using words to obscure things that are happening. Like the “black community doesn’t want this” or “this identity isn’t supposed to do this.”

**RAUL:** I read that as saying, “How do you deal with the fact that race and racism and these very tangible forms of oppression are actually what’s going on here?” Definitely, that’s what this is about, that’s what people are responding to—without reinforcing those rigid identity categories. Like, did you find ways to engage with the fact that this is a struggle against white supremacy, without reinforcing those rigid identity categories? Without putting everyone in rigid boxes and homogenizing their experiences?

**VERA:** I can only think of that answer in terms of what we were *not* doing. Like, we were not doing what ARC (the anti-racism collective) was doing.

**TODD:** We were referring to that earlier, how we chose not to engage in typical ways that activists engage.

**CAMERON:** Also, it seems like white radicals or anarchists being there had an effect on people in terms of their understanding of racial dynamics and personal experiences. I’d talk to a lot of people who’d ask, “Whoa, why are you here?” being really perplexed and me being like, “I think about this all the time. I have some personal experience with police violence... It’s different, but it’s something that is pushing me to be here.” I think that blew some people’s minds.

Most of them were not political or had not read anti-racist theory. And the argument from an activist point of view is that they should be reading it, and if they were, they would realize that we’re actually a bad influence or something. Maybe that was a way we influenced things, by being there and not being pawns. Like, actually having thoughts and engaging people without being condescending.

Because sometimes, like that week in August, we were some of the only white people around. That’s pretty awkward, cuz of historical shit. And then for some reason, it became way more white. So that’s an interesting question, too, how did that happen...

**EMMA:** You mean the Leftists being there made it more white?

**VERA:** Yeah.

**CAMERON:** Did it become “safer” for people? Were there figures people could point to, to be like, this is the new leader of the radical movement and I can talk to them, instead of it just being alienating and scary in some racist way.

**VERA:** Well, OBS [The Organization for Black Struggle] got huge during all of this. That was part of it. That was a way people could engage and feel good about themselves as white activists.

**MASIE:** Do you all feel like between daytime and nighttime the racial make-up was different? Because the few times I was there at night, I was like “me and my friends are the only white people here.”

**CAMERON:** Yeah.

**LUCA:** At the beginning.

**VERA:** And in November.

**LUCA:** On South Florissant.

**VERA:** You mean West Florissant?\*

**LUCA:** Yeah, West Florissant.

**CAMERON:** South Florissant was a little more mixed.

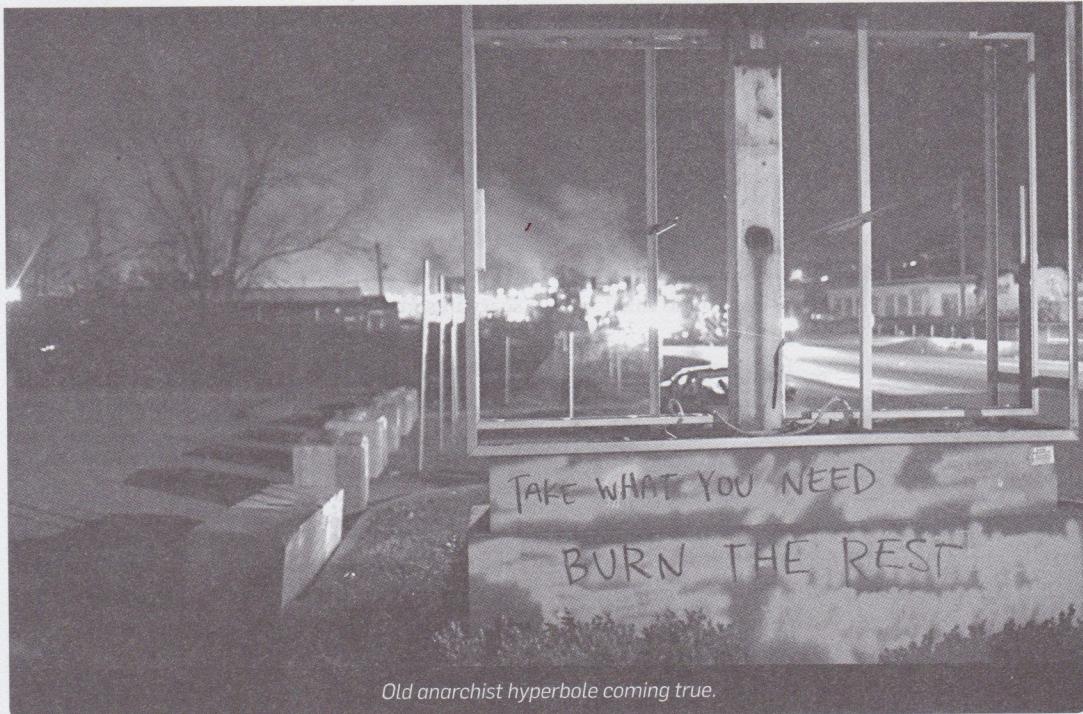
**VERA:** But yeah, every time I said, “Fuck the police,” there was some black person or group of black people around who would be like, “Oh my god, that white person just said ‘fuck the police.’”

**[SEVERAL PEOPLE]:** yeah.

**VERA:** And laugh at me!

**EMMA:** Sometimes I was like, is it cuz I’m white or cuz I’m a woman?

\* The two main roads where riots broke out in Ferguson are several miles from each other but are both called Florissant. West Florissant is the main road near the Canfield Apartments where Mike Brown was murdered and is the site of the famous burning QT. South Florissant is a more developed, racially mixed part of Ferguson where the Ferguson Police Department is, and where much of the rioting that happened after the November 24 announcement of the grand jury decision took place.



*Old anarchist hyperbole coming true.*

**VERA:** Yeah.

**LUCA:** It's both, I think.

**EMMA:** I didn't know if other people who aren't women also got that.

**CAMERON:** I got laughed at for saying it. But I did get offered a joint once or twice after saying stuff.

**MASIE:** I think people just thought I was a cop. And so I'm not gonna ask someone for their number right now or what their name is or if they're on Facebook... cuz they probably think I'm a cop.

**RAUL:** Sometimes people would laugh at me and repeat "Fuck the police" in my accent. I think we may have made a positive contribution in chipping away at the idea that white people don't care about fighting the police. Or maybe next time, if things continue, maybe even years from now, there are many more people in the city who have seen white people willing to confront the police. And maybe that's a step closer to us being able to link up with each other in conflict situations.

#### Trauma

**EMMA:** I've been thinking about the impact that violence has on us, and how it can be glorified within

an anarchist subculture. Something about the rebellion, the uprising... even on the nights where there weren't guns, it was a war zone. And if we want to sustain, or to build, a culture of resistance where it's normal for that to happen... It seems like moments of the world that we want to see opening up will contain violence. I don't like the violence, but I like what the violence opens up. But how does that violence affect us? How can we sustain it and not become what we hate about the violence? Which can be theoretical or interpersonal, like how we care for each other.

**LUCA:** One of the things that I've been thinking is that I still want this. Like, even though we went through this very real experience of violence, like maybe we're some of the very small pockets of people directly affected by the violence of that week and a half. I've been trying to make sense of that for myself, and realizing that this is still something that I want, even though that happened. I don't want it not to have happened. In any part of me.

**EMMA:** We could have done without it, but it doesn't stop you.

**VERA:** Well, it may have stopped me a little bit. In November, when we were out there and there was so much gunfire, I was ready to go because of what happened. There was a point at which I was like,

"This is real." There's this person walking down the street next to me with a beer in one hand and a pistol in the other just shooting randomly into the air. And that was enough.

**LUCA:** Yeah, I'm not saying it didn't affect us. We were together in those moments [in November] where it was just like, "Yeah, let's go home. This is reminding me too much of what happened."

**CAMERON:** We were standing in the same spot [where our friend was shot during the August riots].

**VERA:** It goes back to that idea that maybe we weren't adding that much to the riot. Maybe we don't need to be there because we're not adding anything. We can go and try to push things somewhere else, you know?

**RAUL:** But we didn't. We just went home.

**MASIE:** Would it be upsetting to people if I talked about what happened to our friend who got shot? And the potential for that to happen in the future?

**EMMA:** We didn't expect that to happen, so it's good that people know that's a possibility.

**MASIE:** Immediately after we'd found out he'd survived and for a few weeks after, I was hearing from people, "Thank god this is over." Which makes sense in some way, but in my head, I'm like, "Well, if shit ever gets crazy again, it's not like people aren't going to be bringing handguns to shoot in America, or at least in a place like St. Louis." This actually might happen to our friends in the future. We might fucking die in the future. Or..."

**LUCA:** Or not even handguns. Like, state forces, you know? I don't think it was that far away from them starting to open fire on the crowd. Or, that was not out of the question.

**MASIE:** Sure, but I don't think it was close, necessarily.

**LUCA:** I'm just saying it wasn't out of the question. Like, if they'd gotten shot at enough. All it takes is one trigger-happy cop.

**CAMERON:** This is something that other people have talked about, but this sort of glorification of these situations... where from afar and in writing you can write about how it was this uprising against police and the state and it was all just this crazy, beautiful

thing and sort of glorifying it as if it's a movie scene. It's a very fragmented understanding of it. But there was a push for a while, and maybe still is, of people being like, "Oh yeah, rioting is really cool! It's the best thing!" And for me, I'm actually more interested in the actual rebellion, which encompassed a lot of other things. Like people hanging out and celebrating, or eating or talking or whatever. Organically organizing things in the moment. And then the rioting was a part of that. And maybe it was crucial to that. But...

**LUCA:** I think that's what I mean, too. I mean the overall rebellion, not necessarily just the rioting. I wouldn't not want the rioting as well, but I think it's really good to differentiate that the rioting is an element of a rebellion.

There is a warrior culture that's not talked about. When I said that earlier, I meant more of the ghetto warrior culture, but also like anarchist warrior culture. Like, that we're gonna go to jail, get the shit kicked out of us, people are gonna die, and you're just supposed to take it. It's just expected. It's just part



*Thousands of police and National Guardsmen failing to preserve order, November 24.*

of your struggle, and you're just supposed to suck it up. Like, I had to work through some of those ideas with some of my own trauma. That it's OK to be like, "This was devastating. It was awful and terrible and heartbreaking and hard." Working through that cultural idea that we have, that we don't address.

**EMMA:** Yeah, that we've gotta be hard and militant.

**CAMERON:** I also think about how there are other people who didn't come out because of that. There are so many people who were probably saying, "I don't wanna go out there. I fucking hate the police, but I'm not gonna go out there, because there are guns."

I don't know exactly what those people think, but I think it probably had an effect on people not wanting to be there, especially people that, because of their lives or their experiences, are opposed to a lot of the things in this world. I can't calculate it, but I definitely heard people saying that. I could see people being scared, screaming when gunshots went off, and crying. That's the warrior culture thing that's a part of that.

**LUCA:** Yeah, people thought we were crazy to put ourselves in that situation.

**MASIE:** I was gonna say that, too, about the expectations that these crazy things will happen and we'll just have to deal with it. There are people who can't deal with it, they realize that too late, and they just disappear. They just change their life completely, because the standard of what an anarchist is has been built up so much, it's like unchangeable. Or that's the reason why some people start snitching on each other. Like, "Holy fuck, now I'm facing all these years in prison, and I was told that I could handle this, and I can't fucking handle this."

**CAMERON:** It also seems to oppose this dichotomy that you're either the crazy one or you're the respectable one, where you're part of the movement or an organization. It ends up working out in favor of the organizations in some ways. There's no other way to be that doesn't fit into that dichotomy. There's not an infinite number of possibilities of how to engage. It whittles everything down to a few choices.

**VERA:** Is that what you [Raul] were trying to say before? I've been thinking about what you said when you said, "We didn't do anything, we just went home."

**RAUL:** Yeah, finding some other creative way of engaging if we weren't gonna stay in the streets. I wanna hear other people's thoughts on this, but I didn't notice us having a warrior culture where we just expected everyone to be tough and not have to feel anything about that, not ever have to take a step back. Like, I know that that exists. Has existed for generations and does exist and has existed among us sometimes.

But in this situation, I noticed us taking good care of each other. And like, fighting and coming home and crying together. And fighting and also taking care of our friends. And listening to each other when we couldn't fight anymore (most of the time).

So I took a lot out of the violent and directly combative aspects of what we were doing, and I felt really

supported in that direct confrontation, or war-like scenario, by my friends. I didn't feel like I just had to try to be really hard. It felt like I could be brave when I could and then cry about it when I was done being brave so I could be brave again the next day.

*Care and Autonomy:  
"There Are Also the People at Home"*

**LUCA:** I think that we did do a good job of taking care of one another, especially that first week and the first couple weeks after our friend got shot. But it did come up a little bit in the dynamics of agency and power and who's comfortable in the streets, and how close they could be to police lines. And people feeling ashamed of their fear for not being able to be where other people were. That came up some. But I think people tried to handle it really well.

I'm also talking about how I've internalized that, as someone who's been an anarchist my whole adult life. And then having to go through and be so intimately connected to what happened to [our friend who got shot], and then trying to unravel all that for myself, you know?

And trying to figure out the ways this long-term trauma and violence impacted my own life. Looking at myself and trying to figure out where that trauma manifests, like when [in November] I was trying to be back at the intersection where our friend was shot. And like, knowing it's time to leave, and not being frozen. Being able to function in a space where we're surrounded by more gunfire and more literal fire than we were the first week. And being able to function, to be OK and feel comfortable in that environment or that terrain. But then to come back later and have to listen to a trauma therapist be like, "Yeah, it's fucked up what happened to you. Really, really fucked up. And it's not normal." And just being like, "Huh..." It's my own internal process around being "tough" or "hard." What it means to grow up and spend your whole adult life within this culture.

**MASIE:** I wonder too about when to tell someone maybe not to do something cuz it's gonna affect them if it goes poorly, or when am I just like, "That's their own fucking life. I'm not gonna tell them what to do or control them in any way."

For example, I have a hard time not mouthing off to police, especially when I get really worked up. Repeatedly over the years, if I'm yelling in a cop's face, friends will be like, "OK, you need to stop doing that." I think it's partially for my own sake, but maybe partially for theirs, because they're the ones that will have to stay up all night to bail me out, right?

So is that just that experience multiplied by a thousand? Like, "You're going into an area where people are getting shot and almost killed. I'm the one that's gonna have to fucking bury you." I'm not gonna put that guilt on someone. It's just hard for me. Because in those situations, where people are just rushing out the door to go to the riot in North County, and I'm exhausted, and I need a night to not do anything, but it's like, "Well, realistically, I might be the one that has to bail them all out of jail and stay up all night." Does that make sense at all? I'm not telling people they shouldn't do those things, I'm just saying that's some sort of reality.

**LOUISE:** That's something that I've thought about for sure. When there is a sort of warrior culture where not everyone is going out and being a warrior, there are also the people at home who are going to experience the loss of someone and have to deal with that. And people who are always on alert that someone might be taken from them, or that they might have something really awful happen to someone else. I'm sure in Canfield, that's something that a lot of black women experience constantly. At any point, they could get a call that someone's been shot, someone they know. The element that's scary about some people being warriors is that it's not just those going out being warriors. There's also people at home.

**RAUL:** It makes sense in the context of the anarchist movement that romanticizes rioting and conflict to highlight the downsides of that. And also, I can dream of and put together strategically in my mind a social revolution that doesn't look like that, or a moment where the world changes dramatically in a way that I want it to.

But in those moments when I was in the streets and it was overwhelming, or there were guns everywhere, I also had the thought that this is just what it's always gonna look like. All these moments you've dreamed of, of the world changing and getting to be one that's worth living in for you and the people around you, this feels like a stage that we will inevitably have to move through—and participate in if we want it to go a way that we want it to go. If we're serious about the world changing, we have to adapt ourselves to the fact that maybe that's the reality that we'll have to deal with and learn to cope with. And maybe it's just a matter of not romanticizing it. If enough of us have gone through it, we wouldn't have the kind of fetishization, but maybe we could have a realistic acceptance that that's what stands between us and the world that we hope for. Unfortunately.

## *Guns and Possibility*

**VERA:** Do we need to take a break right now? I worry about this conversation being hard.

**MASIE:** So... if people are using handguns, you might get shot, we realized.

*[laughter]*

**LUCA:** We realized that's real.

**EMMA:** It could be your friend and not just some stranger. And it could be like a permanent loss from your life.

**RAUL:** We shouldn't fetishize it, but we also shouldn't...

**VERA:** Avoid it.

**RAUL:** Right, we can't avoid it. We can't control these circumstances either. They're gonna come up. We can highlight the value of not bringing guns. But people are gonna do it anyway. So what are we gonna do?

**LUCA:** Yeah, like, this question of the role of firearms. It's hard to know what to say about them. But we all know they changed the way it went. It created this deeply inhospitable environment where the cops would not come in because of guns.

**MASIE:** And sometimes it was casual and it wasn't that scary. It was like firing a few rounds into the air, and the cops are gone. The police helicopters are gone.

**CAMERON:** And then the night... it was intense that our friend got shot, but even then, it was just like, these kids have guns and they're smoking weed and just hanging out.

**LUCA:** Right, that's just what it is. They're just everywhere.

**CAMERON:** Some of us were talking to them, you know?

**RAUL:** And the night of the verdict, people shooting at the cops was what instigated collective action. People were shooting off away from the crowd, and the crowd of people moved towards that. Towards the gunshots.



*Looting in Ferguson, November 24.*

**VERA:** Intentionally.

**RAUL:** And as they started moving toward it, intentionally, they started also smashing windows, confronting the police...

**LUCA:** That moment that broke the tension... where everyone was standing around the night of the verdict for like 15 minutes [after the verdict was announced]... nothing's happening, we're all just standing there. Literally, there is like six shots fired and shit starts.

**VERA:** Someone actually said, "Well, that's gonna pop shit off." And it did.

**MASIE:** Which doesn't mean you have to fire gunshots to make shit happen.

**EMMA:** Right. Without guns it's us versus them, and the enemy is clear. And then, I know that people with guns are still against the same enemy, but it is like, "OK, you have a gun, you have the power now too." And we should have the power, not just the police, but still, that's real. It stops you a little bit.

**MASIE:** Yeah, it can . . . in these situations, where it opens it up and makes power more diffuse, sometimes

when people start shooting, it's like, "And now we're all just running away, and the night's over." Which sometimes, if the night's over, then it's a good time to do that. But sometimes it's like, "Well, you made that decision for all of us."

**EMMA:** I do feel like the world that we dream of, and having those moments of uncontrollability or possibility open up, will entail violence. And so just normalizing that, being emotionally prepared for that, and dispelling the glorification of it or the romanticization of it.

There's something too, though, in the dichotomy—or, it can feel like a dichotomy—that you either are militant or you're passive. And the riot is crucial, but in a rebellion, how do you sustain this and how do you not make it just against police but against our whole lives? Yeah, we want a social revolution.

And somehow, for people who are supporting or don't want to engage in the same way, there need to be spaces or other things they can do. Or when people are shooting guns and someone's scared and has to leave, what else can they do? Or, you don't want to stay in the middle of a confrontation with police, so what do you do to add something?

I mean, we need everything to be transformed. Every relation, everything. So there's more than just fighting in that one way—even though it's those

moments where there's violence that open up what we desire. And that's brutal... and worth it. Or, you have to come to that for yourself—if it's worth it to you.

**LOUISE:** It's interesting how much the guns being around... that people having guns, sort of enables the Left and the organizers to blame everyone who does stay out on those nights, to be like "Here you go, cops, take these crazies, they must be crazy if they're still out here. And they want to fuck all kinds of shit up and shoot everybody, so take 'em."

And that really enables people to say, "These are the non-violent people, and these are clearly the crazy, violent people." And that really serves them, to sort of sacrifice the people like that. I mean, especially on the night of the curfew, that really served them. "We're telling everybody to go home and it's just the crazy people who we can't control that we're gonna give you. That are gonna stay here."

**CAMERON:** And also it's a great strategy for police, cuz they can just be like, "We can do whatever the fuck we want now." Whereas before, there were clearly peaceful protesters, and they couldn't. So they just mass arrest people.

#### *Moments of Joy*

**EMMA:** We were supposed to talk about the wonderful moments.

**LUCA:** Oh yeah... let's do that.

**VERA:** One of my favorite moments was the night... it was the last night when we were all on Canfield [Monday, August 18th] and there's that restaurant right there...

**LUCA:** Red's?

**CAMERON:** The BBQ place?

**VERA:** Yeah, Red's, I guess it was Red's... and the cops were not coming down Canfield, so people were sort of playing with that area in between where most of the crowd was and where the cops were. And this kid lit a Molotov and just threw it into the middle of the street. And everyone was like "What!? Come on! Don't waste it! Why the fuck did you throw it there?"

[laughter]

**VERA:** So he lit another one and poured a whole bunch of gas into Red's and then everybody was

like "OK, make this one count!" And so he runs up there again and throws it and lights it on fire... and everyone's cheering.

**CAMERON:** But then the fire went out and some person started running towards it with a jug of something... And I was like, "Oh, man, c'mon. He's puttin' the fire out." And then it was just gasoline...

[laughter]

**CAMERON:** He started just pouring gasoline all over it. And I was like, "This is not what I expected." Normally when someone's running toward a fire, they're putting it out.

**LUCA:** Going back to the people who the media made invisible out there... All the young women out there. All the young women on the front lines. Not backing down and not going home.

**EMMA:** Yeah, even when they\* would be like, "Get the women out of here."

**VERA:** Yeah, so many women were like, "Fuck that."

**MASIE:** I'm just gonna say it, I liked the party atmosphere down there and I liked smoking weed with those teenagers...

[laughter]

**LUCA:** I had a night when it was like a block party [Thursday, August 14<sup>th</sup>] where I got high at the end of the night and it changed everything... I was just like, "This is so amazing."

[laughter]

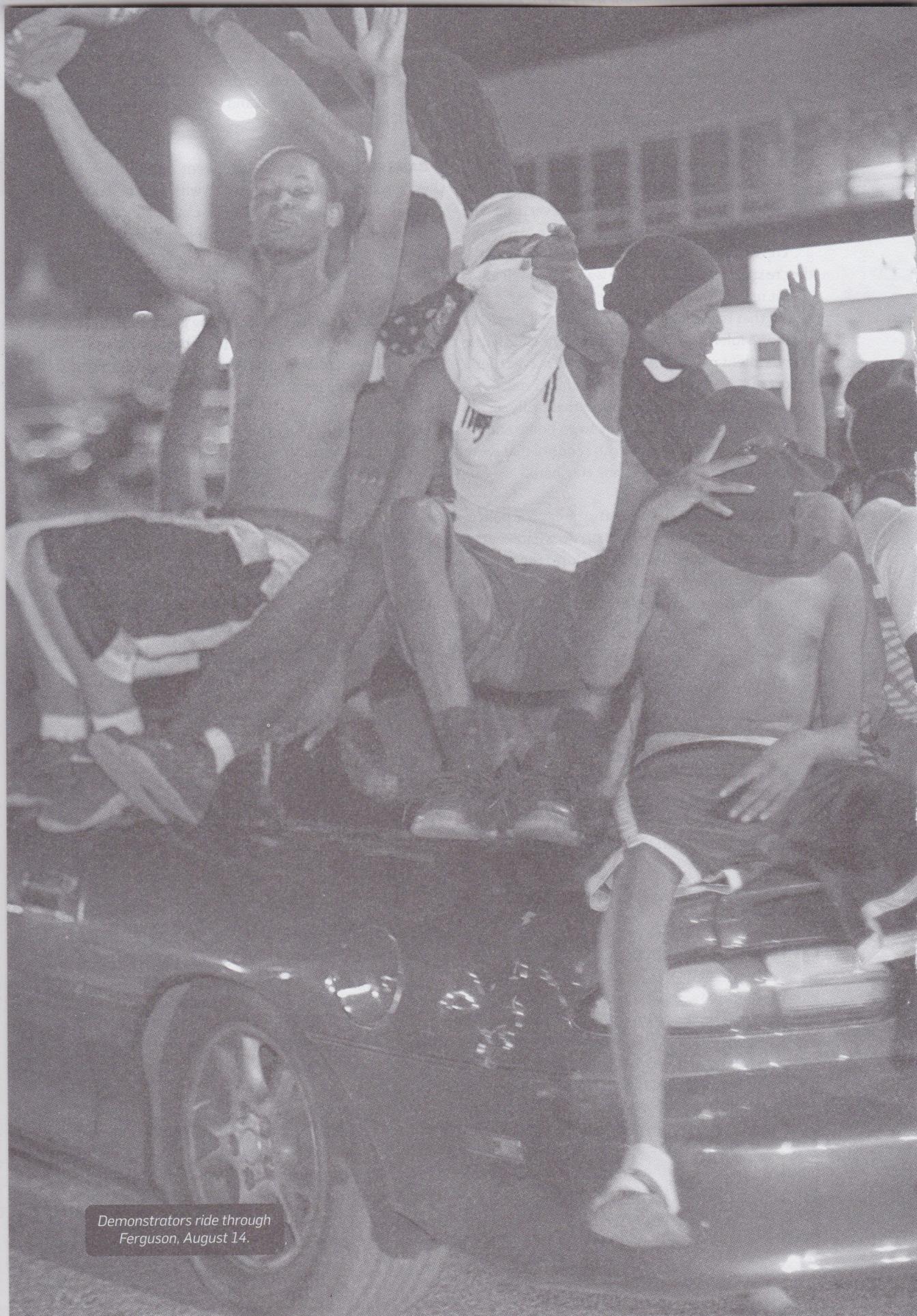
**RAUL:** Yeah, you were texting me, like, "you gotta get down here! This is so amazing!" I texted Cameron and I was like, "So I need to get down there?" and Cameron was like, "Luca's really high."

**CAMERON:** Yeah, it's cool, but... maybe you don't have to rush down here.

**LUCA:** It just made everything that much more surreal and that much more beautiful. It was so cheesy, but, it was just like, "Oh yeah..."

Well, it gives you pause cuz we'd been in it all week, like all week this was happening and happening and

\* The Nation of Islam and the some elements of the New Black Panther Party were most responsible for initiating these calls.



*Demonstrators ride through Ferguson, August 14.*

it was like, "No way, this is really happening, this is my real life right now."

**EMMA:** And it was awesome how the QT became a monument. Everyone was there taking photos of themselves and of each other.

**RAUL:** And doing graffiti and having dance parties...

**VERA:** ...and handing out hot dogs...

**LUCA:** Yeah, and all the kids who were there. All the times that there were children or were pregnant women... especially earlier in the day, and sometimes late at night.

**MASIE:** I remember one of our friends saying... the second night after Vonderrit Myers was shot [Thursday, October 9<sup>th</sup>], she had her daughter there, and she was running around, doing all kinds of toddler-type things. She was hanging out with other children that age, and then our friend was talking to their mothers, asking them "Is this irresponsible of us to have kids here? You know, since it could get violent." And the moms were like, "It would be irresponsible for them *not* to be here. They need to be here, we need to teach them about this." I thought that was really awesome, really powerful.

**CAMERON:** There was some child psychiatrist who came out on the news saying, "Do not take your children here. They haven't formed their reality of the world yet."

**LUCA:** That's exactly why you need to take them there.

**VERA:** I was at Vonderrit's memorial one night, and there weren't that many of us there, but there was a woman there with five kids, and some asshole came by in his car talking about "another thug martyr," yelling all this racist shit. And then the people that were at the memorial attacked his car and were kicking it and throwing shit and he raced away.

And that woman was like, "That was so important for my kids to see that. To see people fight back. To not accept that sort of thing."

**MASIE:** All the people hanging out of cars.

**EMMA:** Oh god, like twenty people! On some car that could barely pull itself.

[laughter]

**VERA:** Yeah, there were a ton of cars cruisin' up and down West Florissant.

**EMMA:** It was even fun when you were sitting in your car eating and you're like, "Well, I think we should go home now," but then we stay and then the split second you decide to leave something happens and then you're like "No, gotta stay." And that just happens all night long.

**RAUL:** The collective momentum and anger and excitement when people are flipping over a cop car. It takes a lot of people, you really gotta give it your all. Every inch of space on that cop car was somebody trying really hard. It's just a really beautiful experience. And how excited people are when it finally goes over.

**VERA:** And then the cop car on fire with things shooting out of its trunk. That was really beautiful.

**MASIE:** Yeah, I remember the first night of the riot. And being like, "Shit, there's a lot of people at that QT without masks on." And then an hour later seeing fire and I was like, "Well... that's one way of dealing with it. Won't be leaving any evidence."

[laughter]

**MASIE:** Yeah, the first night of the riot I remember us all getting back together at the house and everyone being euphoric, like, "Did that really just fucking happen, oh my god!"

**EMMA:** Well, should we say anything else, or... end it in some grand way?

**VERA:** That seemed pretty grand.

## IV. Looking Forward

### WHERE WE ARE, WHAT COMES NEXT

A compelling narrative with a protagonist that everyone can relate to is supposed to be the centerpiece of quality fiction writing, not to mention successful journalism. Yet no two people tell a story the same way. How does a story change depending on who tells it? What are its unseen roots? How is it racialized, for instance?

It's revealing how different people chart the lineage of the surge of anti-police activity in 2014. Some look back to the acquittal of the man who murdered Trayvon Martin, some to the murder of Oscar Grant, some to the Rodney King riots. Whose names do we remember? In Ferguson, graffiti at the QT proclaimed "LA '92/Watts '65/Spain '36." Which lineage is that?

#### Building the Story

Let's go back to the beginning/the middle/a long time back/a little ways back. In the US, for decades now, we've been experiencing the effects of the redirecting portion of a cycle of recuperation. Many of the people who fought in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s have

been thoroughly incorporated into the system, so that they can be used to legitimize the state,\* while most of the people who refused to compromise have been incarcerated or killed. Diversity trainings for every police department, as well as black prison wardens and presidents, have become a palliative program for maintaining social inequities. As part of this process, the non-profit complex has been solidifying its role as the gentle hand of the state, taking up the language of combative cultures past and reworking it into the rhetoric of social justice activism—once called civil rights activism—so that it can interface more legibly with power.<sup>†</sup>

An important piece of the non-profit puzzle has been the institutionalization and specialization of anti-oppression politics, creating a new discourse

\* Read about Mayor Jean Quan and other activists turned politicians in the 'zine *Escalating Identities/Who is Oakland?*

† About ten years ago, for instance, a former Black Panther noted that after he came out of prison, he was expected to give up all the information to the state that he had been careful to protect as a Panther—under the guise of grant writing. For more about the non-profit thing, check out *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

useful for those interested in a specific kind of control: reform.<sup>‡</sup> The rhetoric of identity politics and allyship flattens a complicated terrain of overlapping and oppositional experiences. It centralizes personal experience in a way that fosters both an overinflated sense of self-importance and an obsessive self-criticism that can be paralyzing.<sup>§</sup> Also, by framing the project of taking leadership from *those who are most affected* as an objective moral duty, it obscures the essential question of how people choose who to ally with. We all exist in a multiplicity of realities that are in constant flux,<sup>¶</sup> but the language of identity politics forces a static identification, falsely unifying people in categories according to a few characteristics, despite all other difference.

In response, some comrades theorized a few years ago that the refusal of fixed identity would be central to the coming insurrections—that rejecting our individual subjectivities was essential to rewriting our culturally held mythologies of power. As a reaction against managerial and pacifying identity politics, this made sense—but in practice, the abolition of identity was never more than a gross oversimplification.<sup>\*\*</sup> A peculiar self-centering becomes implicit in this apparent self-abolition. When we remove all language about our experiences of difference, pretending that all we have to do to negate our socialization is to proclaim it so, which unspoken, singular narrative easily replaces all the others? This rhetoric also implied that in moments of open conflict, it would be easy to find each other across our socially imposed roles through a shared combative culture—because when we’re rioting, we’re all one. In a strange parallel with the identity politics it rejected, this rhetoric centered individualized personal experience once more, disregarding the challenges to achieving more than a fleeting connection across socially imposed gulfs.

For too long, anarchists have been left in a void between the rejection of identity politics and the rejection of identity, grasping for an approach to understanding narrative and experience while resisting the totalizing force of definition. Meanwhile, most of the major political struggles of the last several years have centralized questions about racialized

<sup>‡</sup> Reform isn’t neutral; it moves us backwards. After social conflict comes to the surface, giving movement to bound things, reform serves to put us all back where we started, immobilized again.

<sup>§</sup> Think about how “the personal is political” devolved into the lipstick feminism of the white, middle-class third wave.

<sup>¶</sup> The middle class American/colonizer project is one of imposing stability on a system that will never stabilize. This gives some insight into how definition itself is violence.

<sup>\*\*</sup> See En Vogue’s song, *Free Your Mind*. “Colorblind, don’t be so shallow” is still the proper response.

power, specifically anti-black (and sometimes anti-brown) violence—foregrounding (in)visibility and (a socially imposed) lack of subjectivity<sup>††</sup> from a very different angle. Protest cultures that remain stuck in controlled or single-issue approaches have become obsolete<sup>‡‡</sup>; today’s struggles force multiple axes of power to the surface. We need new ways of understanding and engaging with them.

## Inside and Out

When deep-rooted social conflicts are pushed to the surface, people rush to conceal them again. Hide away the problems. Keep trouble from spreading. Sew the ruptures in the social fabric back together. Whatever their motivations, proponents of social peace use both physical and rhetorical means to achieve this; sometimes, they’re more dangerous than the cops.

Liberal leaders and authoritarian groups from far and wide fought hard for control of the narrative in Ferguson. The recuperative power of the black left was in full effect, expressed via an array of tactics to discredit everyone who could not be reconciled with the state. From organizing separate daytime protests that were coordinated with city officials, to using the legacies of dead militants to justify demands for nonviolence, to launching public smear campaigns, leftists vied to undermine the possibility of self-organization. Even corporate media picked up on the divergence of agendas between (more targeted) black youth and the people of color who hoped to “lead” them, practically all of whom were more integrated into the power structure and had more reason to remain compliant. Despite the forces arrayed against them, many of the people in Ferguson were determined to gain control of the streets, and pushed the would-be managers aside. What would it take for this rejection of the political left to outlast the days of open conflict?

In a parallel containment practice, media, politicians, and revolutionary leaders alike decried “white

<sup>††</sup> Check out Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbembe, and Calvin Warren to read more on Afro-Pessimism and anti-blackness.

<sup>‡‡</sup> Fighting racialized power is increasingly central to the vital conflicts that are erupting today, in the same way that repressive inclusion is increasingly central to the shutting down of revolutionary possibility. The previously mentioned People’s Climate March of September 2014 was a classic example of the latter: it boasted the diversity language central to the nonprofit organizing model and insisted that it “made history,” and yet it took up none of the questions, tactics, or strategies that Ferguson had pushed to the fore. Rather, the form of organization conspired to suppress them, using the language of diversity against diversity itself.

# In response to the cooptation of identity politics, some comrades theorized that the refusal of fixed identity would be essential to the coming insurrections. Yet the question of *who the protagonists are* has been central to the revolts that spread from Ferguson.

anarchists" as outside agitators.\* This approach to pacification, aimed at fracturing any possible cohesion those fighting state power might find through conflict, typically separates out good protestors from

\* The operation of creating outside agitators is a microcosm of the process of re-inclusion/re-exclusion that stabilizes capitalism and white supremacy. This tactic has been used repeatedly, especially against populations of people who have been forced to relocate through immigration or exile. In the 1960s, for instance, it was frequently a defensive maneuver white Southerners used, labeling as "outside agitators" the black youth whose families had moved north during the diaspora after emancipation.

bad ones and draws lines along race and ethnicity.<sup>†</sup> In Ferguson, the black managerial class tried to use this to link whiteness—in this rare case, an undesirable identifier—with property destruction, looting, and other undesirable actions. This was a divisive tactic to prey on people's fears, spread mistrust, and discourage others from showing up. How can revolutionaries and other activists parrot the media and police rhetoric that obviously serves to reinforce, rather than collapse, the power of the state?

<sup>†</sup> How was this different in Ferguson, where the black youth who are typically drawn as criminal outsiders were already painted as some of the protagonists of this story?

The phrase “white anarchists” is ripe with problems and questions. It invisibilizes anarchist people of color—perhaps in order to separate anarchism out as a professional or political class, something that is not for poor people, and definitely not for poor people of color. Anarchism is not a white radical phenomenon—but let’s be real, much of anarchist culture is intensely racialized. Anarchist cultures carry within them many of the problems we inherit from white supremacist culture; most of them remain disproportionately rooted in European history, and many suffer side effects from the exploitation and tokenization of people of color that is popular among the authoritarian left.

In the midst of post-Ferguson conversations about how whiteness and anti-blackness are normalized and maintained in this culture, we have to ask how we reproduce white supremacist culture in anarchist cultures. How do we fetishize and tokenize people we want to be in struggle with, or combative cultural norms that we idealize, in a way that keeps them outside? For instance, let’s not use the growing popularity of Afro-pessimist critiques to make our anarchist projects seem more relevant without re-evaluating the foundations of our theory and practice in light of them. When it comes to future anti-police struggles, anarchists—as a body that is certainly not singular—will likely be both inside of and outside of the social dynamics and demographics of those struggles, and we will continue to have to reconcile the limitations and opportunities that situation creates.

The lifelong projects of destroying whiteness and class society necessitate attacking the structures that reinforce them. This is not just a question of our personal conduct, relationships, or social norms.<sup>‡</sup> It may be that when we’re rioting, we’re not magically all the same, but we can fight together in a way that acts against our socially imposed positions in this world. We can choose to act against the parts of our own identities that otherwise cause us to wield power over others and/or to play the victim.

## Fighting Formations

Anarchists tend to fight from the outside. Whether or not we gather in self-identified radical circles of friends, anarchists intentionally position ourselves

<sup>‡</sup> For those who are not on the receiving end of the legacy of colonization and slavery, these projects do mean being ready to take flack for looking like a dumb white person (or whatever the equivalent is in your case). But don’t worry, it won’t be as bad as being on that receiving end.

outside and against almost everything else. Perhaps this is because we are theoretically opposed to being involved in broad coalitions in order to steer them in a certain direction. Perhaps it is because we don’t believe in politicking and don’t want to legitimize it. Whatever the reason, this outsider status often positions us well in the beginning, when social ruptures crack open the center to render *everything* outside; but it often leaves us struggling to catch up as new insides begin forming. We reject this re-forming process, calling it recuperation, but we usually lack a meaningful way to engage with what comes next. How can we—not just anarchists, but rebels of all kinds—make something that transcends our social circles and immediate projects?

Reflecting on the most recent wave of anti-police activity, many anarchists are talking regretfully about not coming out of the days in the streets together with more new relationships that could become long-standing. Anarchists who were in Ferguson say they aren’t surprised that some folks they met there got involved in leftist groups in the following months, partly because there weren’t visible anarchist spaces or projects.<sup>§</sup> During intense periods of social unrest, anarchists sometimes pose a dichotomy between fighting in the streets and “outreach,” as if those are the only options, as if they must be in opposition to each other. Certainly, there are physical limits to what any group of people can do, but there must be ways to connect with folks that increase our capacity for fighting together. Could we engage differently with people during those moments of conflict, in-ways that could change what happens afterwards?

With so many obstacles in place to prevent us from finding common cause—from the far-reaching physical and emotional effects of police violence and state repression to the attitudes and actions of aspiring managerial activists—how do we find each other in those moments of instability? How do we engage with people without defining ourselves in a way that excludes us from everything, while still recognizing the ways we are different? How do we side with militants within embattled communities that we are not a part of, without further contributing to divisions within them that may endanger those potential friends and our relationships with

<sup>§</sup> Midwestern stereotypes aside, there has been an earnestness in many of the accounts from Ferguson that is sometimes lacking from anarchist discourse. A kind of bravado can fill anarchist texts as we front an offensive position when we are actually acting defensively, all while trying to figure out how to sound like we’re being “real.” Often that realness that anarchists search for is as simple as being in touch with your own personal capacity, and understanding how you allow yourself to be pushed beyond it when there is an outside need.



*Power versus authority? New York Mayor de Blasio facing disgruntled NYPD officers.*

them? And how do we search out new directions without obsessing so much over questions of relevance that we fail to recognize when this pushes us to irrelevance?

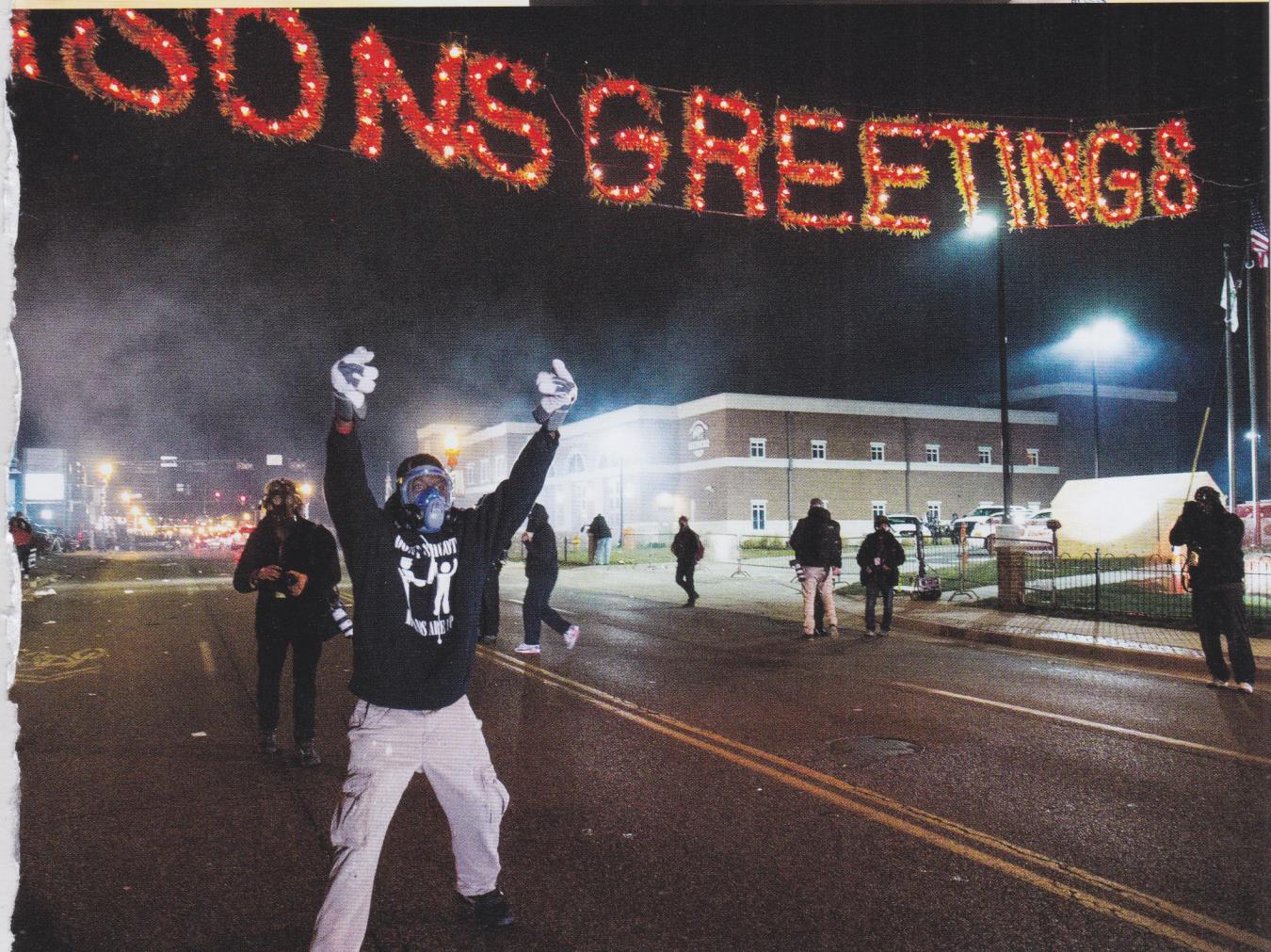
## Finally . . .

In the quieting time after such an historic upheaval, people are quick to ask: What's next? How do we prepare? Honest answers must acknowledge that there's no sure way to know. At best, our predictions will serve as a time capsule, holding a glimpse of what our priorities were to help provide insight for later reflection.

Likely, the next openings of social rupture—and the attempts to close them back up and reroute people's anger—will arise out of the past cycles of resistance and the cooptation that prevented things from going further. For now, social peace has been reestablished, but at a higher level of tension, with a greater degree of force. This precarious balance can only last until another sector of society rises in revolt.

The conflicts that spread from Ferguson were not initiated by anarchists, but drew great interest and participation from anarchists across the country. In this kind of situation, we have to show up prepared to contribute and with a perceptible humility. No one wants to start from someone else's pre-formed political agenda; we all have to figure out what we have to learn from each other. Often, anarchists describe our role in social upheavals as pushing struggle further, but sometimes we are only playing at a criminality that others are much deeper in. In struggles where many of the people involved are responding to the reality of constant low-intensity warfare with the police, we have to be honest with ourselves about what strengths we have to bring and what overtures we are prepared to make good on.

None of the conflicts that came to a head in Ferguson have been resolved, nor do the authorities or their colleagues have any idea how to resolve them. Whether we bring the courage to act, an eye to security and collective safety, specific tactical know-how, or ideas that challenge embedded norms, let's be prepared to engage whenever the next eruptions occur.





Missouri National Guardsmen patrol the  
ruins of Ferguson on November 26, 2014.





# TURKISH ANARCHISTS ON THE FIGHT FOR KOBANÊ





In the night of September 24, we departed from Istanbul to the Kobanê border. We met our comrades who arrived a little bit earlier and together started our human chain border guard in Boydê village, in the west of Kobanê. There were hundreds of volunteers like us who came from different parts of Anatolia and Mesopotamia to the border to form a human chain along 25 km of the borderline in different villages like Boydê, Bethê, Etmankê, and Dewşan. One of the aims of the human chain was to stop manpower, arms, and logistical support to ISIS from the Turkish State, whose support to ISIS is known by everyone. In the border villages, life itself has transformed into a communal form, despite the war conditions. Another aim of our border watch was to act in solidarity with the people of Kobanê, who had to escape from the attacks against Kobanê, who were delayed at the border

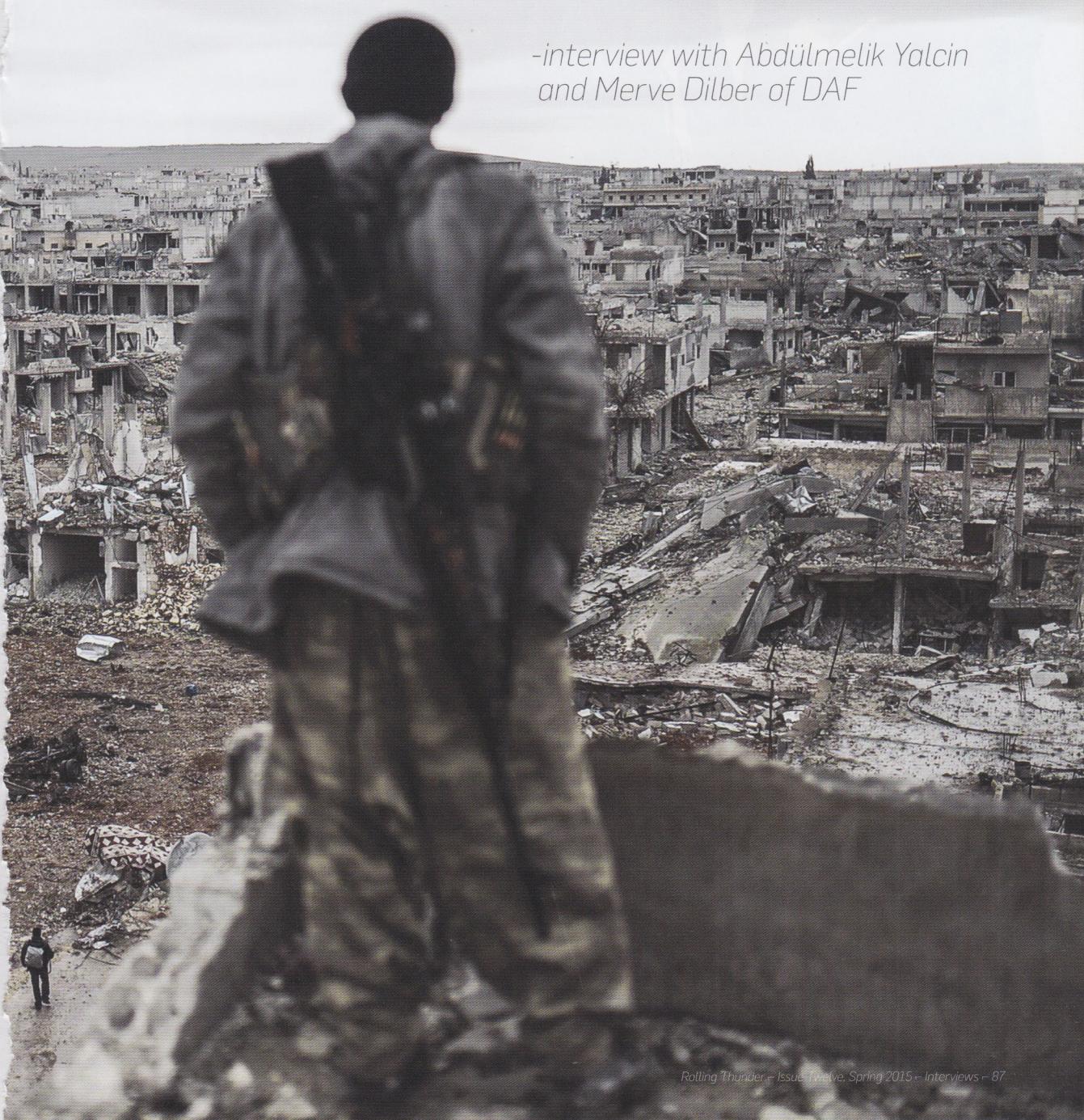


*The ruins of Kobanê on January 30, 2015, four days after ISIS was finally driven out.*

for weeks and who were even attacked by Turkish military police forces. In the first days of our border watch actions, we cut the wires and crossed to Kobanê together with people coming from Istanbul.

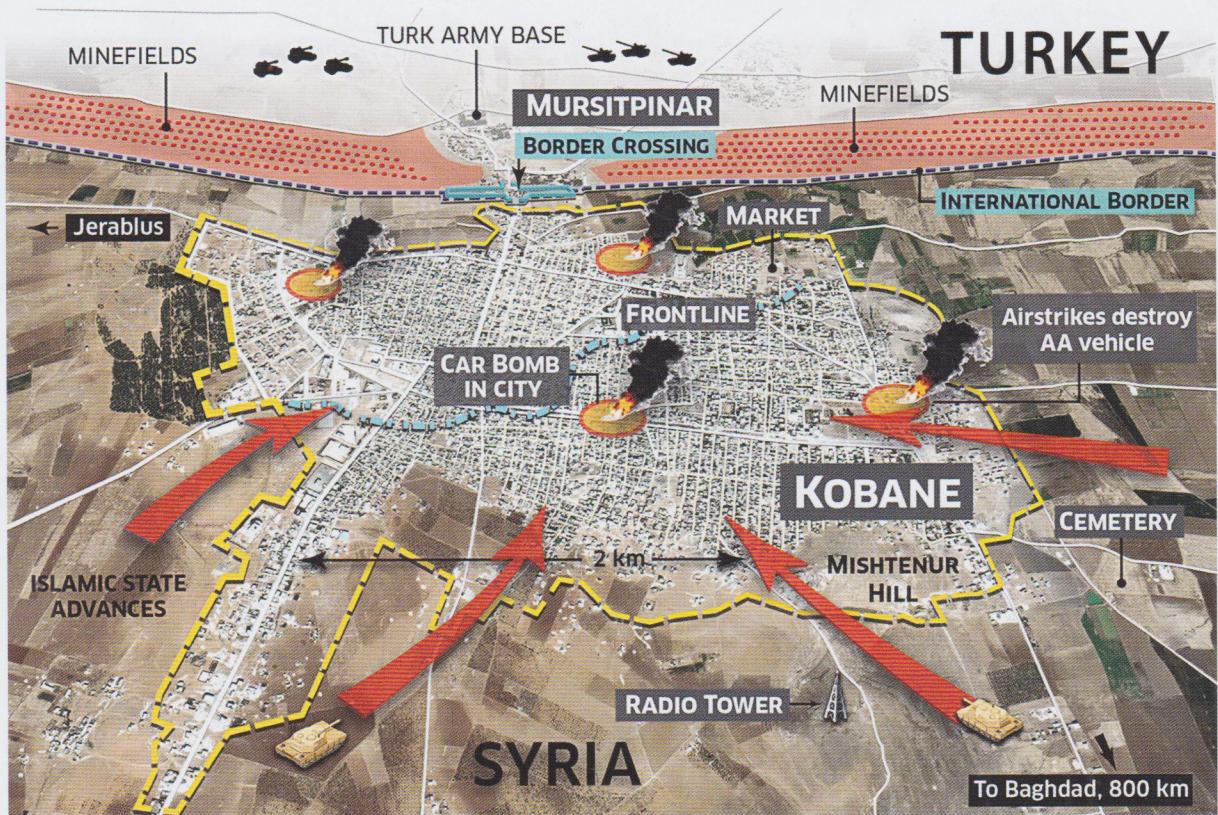
The moment we passed the border, we were greeted with huge enthusiasm. In the border villages of Kobanê, everyone, young and old, was in the streets. YPG and YPJ guerrillas saluted our elimination of borders by firing into air. We rallied in the streets of Kobanê. Later, we had conversations with people of Kobanê and the YPG/YPJ guerrillas who defend the revolution.

*-interview with Abdülmelik Yalcin  
and Merve Dilber of DAF*





Comrades from Revolutionary Anarchist Action (DAF) enter Kobanê to support the fight against ISIS.



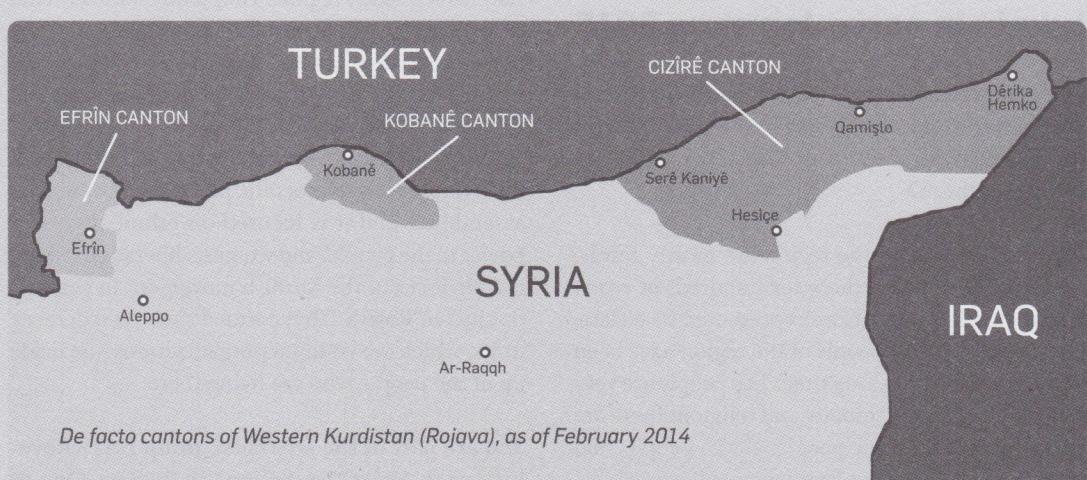
In summer 2013, we interviewed the Turkish group Revolutionary Anarchist Action (Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet, or DAF) about the uprising that began in Gezi Park, covered in the last issue of *Rolling Thunder*. At the end of summer 2014, we learned that DAF was supporting the fierce resistance that residents of the town of Kobanê on Syria's northern border were putting up to the incursion of the fundamentalist Islamic State.

During the civil war in Syria that began in 2011, the Kurdish region of northern Syria asserted its autonomy and began carrying out experiments in horizontal organization under the name Rojava ("Western," as it is the western part of Kurdistan). Rojava is surrounded on all sides by hostile forces: Assad's beleaguered Syrian government, which lost control of the region a couple years ago; the Turkish government, known for oppressing its Kurdish minority; other revolutionary Syrian forces, including Islamic fundamentalists and the US-backed coalition known as the Free Syrian Army; the Kurdish regional government in Iraq, a longtime rival of

Syrian Kurdish organizations; and, most pressingly, the Islamic State, also known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)—an unrecognized state entity that gained control of much of Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2014 using captured armaments brought into the region during the US military occupation.

In September 2014, ISIS pressed north towards Kobanê, hoping to secure control of the entire border with Turkey. Hundreds of thousands crossed the border into Turkey as refugees, fleeing before the advance of the undefeated and notoriously brutal fighters of the Islamic State. But a small handful of Kurdish militants remained in the city, determined to fight for it to the death. For over four months, they waged a street-by-street battle for Kobanê; for much of that time, they were pinned down in the center of the ruined city, with ISIS on three sides and the hostile Turkish government holding the border behind them.

In the United States, we read corporate media accounts of refugees from Kobanê shouting "Long live America!" from across the Turkish border as US airstrikes aimed at Islamic State militants destroyed



*De facto cantons of Western Kurdistan (Rojava), as of February 2014*

**PKK** The Kurdistan Workers' Party, listed as a terrorist organization by the US and other governments on account of its decades-running struggle with the Turkish government to win self-determination for the Kurdish people

**PYD** Democratic Union Party, the Kurdish group in Syria analogous to the PKK in Turkey

**YPG** The People's Protection Units, the men's military wing of the PYD

**YPJ** The Women's Protection Units, the women's military wing of the PYD

**KDP** The US-allied Kurdistan Democratic Party, governing the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq

**Al Nusra** The group representing Al-Qaeda in the Syrian civil war

**Free Syrian Army** US-backed deserters from the Syrian military, portrayed in corporate media as the "moderates" in the civil war; on the ground, they have proven less capable than other fighting forces

**Abdullah Öcalan** One of the founders of the PKK, imprisoned by the Turkish government since 1999; after reading the works of Murray Bookchin and others, he ceased calling for the PKK to establish a Marxist-Leninist nation-state, instead calling for a "democratic confederalism" that "is not a state system, but a democratic system of the people without a state"

**Murray Bookchin** The best-known proponent of "social ecology" in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; Bookchin identified as an anarchist for decades, renouncing anarchism near the end of his life in favor of democracy and participation in municipal elections

their city—a chilling re-legitimization of US military intervention in the Middle East, after the colossal failure of the occupation of Iraq. US Secretary of State John Kerry hinted that Kobanê would inevitably fall to the Islamic State, and maintained that rescuing the city was “not a strategic objective.” Yet in the end, it was not the US military, but the courage of a few ill-equipped autonomous fighters from Rojava that halted the seemingly inexorable advance of the Islamic State across the Middle East, driving ISIS out of Kobanê in late January.

With firsthand reports from the region in short supply, there were bitter polemics between English-speaking anarchists about whether to trust the allegedly libertarian character of the resistance. In hopes of gaining more insight into the situation, we contacted our comrades of DAF once more. The first of these two interviews offers general background on the struggle in Kobanê; the second delves into analytical detail.

## **Interview with a member of DAF on the Slovenian anarchist radio show Črna luknja in early January, 2015**

**Can you give us an overview of the situation in the border region of Turkey and Syria, describing the militias and other key actors that are operating there?**

The people living in the region are mostly Kurds, who have been living there for hundreds of years. This region has never been represented by a state. Because of that, the people of the region have been in struggle for a very long time. The people are very diverse in terms of ethnicity and religion: there are Kurdish people, Arabic people, Yazidi people, and more. One of the major Kurdish people's organizations in Turkey and Iraq is the PKK, and the PYD in Syria is in the same line with the PKK. As for military organizations, there are the YPJ and YPG, the men's and women's organizations.

Against these organizations stand ISIS, the Islamic gangs, in which Al Nusra is involved. These are the radical Islamists. There is also the Free Syrian Army, a coalition of many different groups; they are supported by the capitalist system, but they are not as radical as ISIS. And there is the Turkish state, and Assad's Syrian state, who are on the attack. In northern Iraq, there is also a Kurdish state, under the KDP of Barzani, which is ideologically the same as the Turkish state, but ethnically a bit different.

## **What is the role of the PKK in the region, and the meaning of their supposed libertarian turn?**

The PKK has a bad reputation in the West because of their past. Twenty years ago, when it was founded, it was a Marxist-Leninist group. But a few years ago, it changed this completely and denounced these ideas, because the ideas of their leader changed and so did the people. They went towards a more libertarian ideology after reading the works of Murray Bookchin and on account of some other factors in the region. To understand the situation today, it is also important that in the beginning, the PKK was not so ideological. It did not grow up as an ideological movement, but as a people's movement. This is another factor explaining how it has developed in this direction.

## **What do you mean when you say Rojava revolution? What kind of social experiment is it, and why is it relevant for anti-authoritarian social movements around the world?**

The Rojava revolution was proclaimed two years ago. Three cantons declared their independence from the state, from Assad's regime. They didn't want any kind of involvement with any of the internationally supported capitalist powers. This successfully opened up a third front in the region. It was a moment when the states in the region lost power.

This began as a project of the Kurdish struggle. It involves directly democratic practices like people's assemblies, and it is focused on ethnic diversity, power to the people, and women's liberation, which is a big focus of the Kurdish movement in general, not just in Rojava. They formed their own defense units, which are voluntary organizations just made up of the people who are living there.

**You are part of the anarchist group DAF (Revolutionary Anarchist Action) in Turkey. One of your main activities over the last years has been building solidarity and mutual aid with the people in Kurdistan. Tell us about your group and what your involvement is in the Rojava revolution?**

DAF advocates a revolutionary perspective; we call ourselves revolutionary anarchists because we want anarchism to be socially understood in our region, because in this region anarchism doesn't have any tradition or history. Our first aim is to spread the ideals of anarchism into the social fabric of our society, and for us the practice is more important than theory. Or rather, we build our theory on our practice as revolutionary anarchists.

We are against all forms of oppression. We focus on workers' movements and people's movements that are oppressed due to ethnicity, we stand in solidarity against women's oppression, and we are active in all of those movements. In Rojava, we were in touch with participants in the revolution since it started; when the resistance began in Kobanê, we immediately went to the region; our comrades organized solidarity actions on both sides of the border. We still have people there on a rotating basis, and we are still organizing actions. For example, recently, our women's group organized an action in which they called for conscientious objection in support of the Kobanê resistance.

**DAF has organized on the Turkish-Syrian border, in a "human chain" intended to prevent fighters of the Islamic State from passing over the border from the Turkish side to join in fighting against the Kurdish resistance. Tell us about this form of direct action?**

The Turkish state has been attacking Kobanê from the west. In their discourse, the Turkish state sounds like they are against ISIS, but in practice it permits material resources, arms, and people to pass through the border, and it has been attacking the villages on the border. These villages are not very separate from Kobanê; it's the same families and a lot of people from Kobanê pass through there when they are injured or if they want to join the struggle from the Turkish side of the border. So our comrades are staying in the villages and participating in all the actions in the communes, doing logistical support for the refugees and for injured people.

**Throughout the armed conflict, the mainstream media said that Kobanê would fall, despite the fact that the resistance on the ground never gave up. Why do you think they reported it that way?**

This was a psychological war from the beginning. The media did not want the Kobanê resistance to be heard. The coverage was part of the psychological war, because there was a lot of international support for the resistance. And when it became evident that Kobanê would not fall, they changed tactics: all the international powers tried to give the impression that they were helping with air strikes, and the Kurdish states by sending fighters. This was done right before it was evident that Kobanê would not fall, only in order to give the impression that they are not against this struggle.

**It is obvious that the people's struggle in Kobanê is not in the interest of the prevailing world powers. What do you think the prospects are for the Rojava revolution? What is the situation on the ground now? How can people from other countries support the revolution there?**

Lately, other parts of Rojava have been attacked. If you remember months ago when ISIS first attacked the Yazidi people, the Yazidis were forced to flee from their cities, and they were saved by the YPD fighters. Afterwards, ISIS was repelled. Last week, the Yazidi people have formed their own defense units, similar to those in Rojava. So the struggle is growing in the region, with self-defense and the idea of direct democracy gaining more support.

Also, on the Turkish side of the border, the war is getting harsher. The government is using more violence against the Kurdish resistance. Again, last week, the police attacked and murdered a 14-year-old kid. This shows that the struggle will continue in a more violent way. This matter is not just limited to this region; you can see from the recent attacks on the journalists in France that this has to be taken very seriously on the international level, especially by revolutionaries.

This also shows the importance of the Rojava revolution against ISIS and radical Islamism. I think that international support would mean taking more actions locally against the real powers that are supporting ISIS.

## **Interview with a member of DAF, conducted by CrimethInc. operatives between October and December 2014**

**How successful do you feel the intervention of the DAF has been in providing solidarity to those in Rojava struggling against the Islamic State? What resources or skills are important for anarchist groups to develop in order to be better prepared for situations like this?**

DAF has been in solidarity with the Rojava Revolution since it was declared over two years ago. Our comrades have been there since the first day of the Kobanê resistance, in solidarity, to the best of our ability, with the peoples' struggle for freedom.

We always knew that Kobanê would not fall, and it didn't fall, contrary to what mainstream media reported a hundred times since the resistance began. One month ago, ISIS controlled 40% of Kobanê, now it's 20% and they are backing off. [Since this interview was conducted, ISIS has been completely driven out of Kobanê.] Given that ISIS is losing their battles with other forces in the region and getting weaker, we can say that the Kobanê resistance was successful.

The resources and skills would be different for every specific struggle. The level of oppression and violence are different in every region and the skills for resistance are best built on direct experience. However, the skills of organization and the culture of sharing and solidarity are at least as important as any particular skills for resistance. These are almost universal. DAF has built its own experience on the culture of the commune and struggle against oppression as well as a long-term relationship of mutual solidarity with the Kurdish people and other struggles for freedom in Anatolia and Kurdistan.

Unfortunately, it's not possible to give a more detailed answer here on account of security issues and other concerns.

#### **How is the struggle in Kobanê changing the political context in Turkey, both for Erdogan and for social movements for liberation?**

The Turkish state has had to take steps backward in relation to the resistance in Kobanê. It has stopped openly supporting ISIS, although it is still supporting ISIS behind the scenes. It had occupying plans in the name of creating a "security region," which included military intervention to weaken the Kurdish struggle and also attacking Assad's forces, in alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria. These plans have failed.

The solidarity actions carried out by social movements for liberation spread around the world to an extent that was unseen in recent years. This international solidarity was an important factor in the success of the Kobanê resistance. Rojava is another example proving that people can make a revolution without a vanguard party or a group of the elite, even where there is no industry. And this can happen in a place like the Middle East, where struggling for freedom means fighting against all kinds of oppression, including patriarchy as well as massacres based on ethnicity and religion.

#### **DAF texts have described the Islamic State as "the violent mob produced by global capitalism"**

and "the subcontractor of the States that pursue income strategies on the region." Can you explain precisely what your analysis of the Islamic State is—why it appeared, and whose interests it serves?

It is obvious that the actions of the Islamic State benefit the powers (economic and political) that have goals in the region. These could be direct or indirect benefits that strengthen the hand of these powers. For example, a radical Islamist group is useful for Western economic or political powers to make propaganda about defending Western values. Islamic terror is one of the biggest issues that Western countries make propaganda about. Moreover, it is also a political reality that some countries, including the US, have agreements with these fundamentalists. This is the 50-year-running Middle East policy of Western countries.

The Turkish state expressed a negative view of the Islamic State in every speech of its bureaucrats. But we have witnessed real political cooperation of the Turkish state with the Islamic State in relation to the resistance in Kobanê. So in this situation, it appears that they are supporting Islamic State, but they are claiming that they are not supporting it.

**It seems clear that the Turkish government is hoping for the Islamic State to weaken Kurdish power in the region. But what do you think the Turkish state's long-term goals are in reference to the Islamic State itself?**

The Turkish state has been providing large amounts of arms, supplies, and recruits to ISIS ever since the time when it was part of the globally supported Free Syrian Army. This support continues surreptitiously, since politically the Turkish state had to seem to be against ISIS after the resistance in Kobanê succeeded. Our comrades at the Turkish border with Syria are still reporting suspiciously large transports crossing it.

The Turkish state has strong relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and their joint long-term goal is to gain more power in the region by eliminating Assad's authority. ISIS is their ally in this respect also.

**Arguably, the Islamic State could never have come to power without the weapons and instability that the United States imported to Iraq. At the same time, it appears that US airstrikes and coordination with fighters in Kobanê have played a significant role in preventing the Islamic State from gaining control of the city. Has this enabled**



*Members of DAF with the people of Kobanê, September 2014.*

the United States to legitimize itself among those defending Rojava? What challenges does this create there for anarchists who oppose state power?

This false impression is a product of the mainstream media. US airstrikes began very late, after it was evident that Kobanê would not fall, and they were not critical. The bombings also hit the areas in YPG control “by mistake.” And some ammunition landed in the hands of ISIS also “by mistake.”

The success of the Kobanê Resistance can only be attributed to the self-organized power of the people’s armed forces. Because of this strong resistance, as well as extensive international solidarity, the US and its allies had to take steps backward.

The bombings and media coverage are part of the political maneuvers against the revolution that

will try to destroy it by including it. However, the Rojava Revolution is part of a long history of Kurdish people’s struggle for freedom. Its insistence on being stateless, its gains in the liberation of women, etc. are not coincidences.

The challenge is to communicate the values created in the Rojava Revolution and the political reality of wartime conditions.

Can you say anything on the relationship between armed struggle and vanguardism? Does armed warfare inevitably compromise anti-authoritarian struggles, or are there ways to engage in warfare that do not inevitably produce hierarchies and specialization?

This has been an important conversation in the US after the protests in Ferguson, which involved gunfire from both sides. Some comrades

in Thessaloniki were debating this issue with us, arguing that when guns are introduced to social conflict, it is always a step away from anarchy. But perhaps in some cases there is no other option?

When all the people (who are able) are armed, who is the vanguard? The people's self-defense forces in Rojava include all ages, both men and women (who are already legendary fighters) from all ethnic and religious backgrounds in the region.

The hierarchy created in the armed struggle of the guerrilla does not necessarily mean an exclusive authority in the social structures created by the revolution. This awareness is a part of the Rojava peoples' struggle for freedom.

**In response to some dubious comrades, writers from DAF and the Anarkismo Editors Group have made strong arguments that it is important to act in solidarity with the struggle in Rojava whether or not it is an explicitly "anarchist" struggle. But no society, ethnic group, or struggle is homogeneous; each contains internal conflicts and contradictions, and the hardest part of solidarity work is usually figuring out how to take sides (or avoid taking sides). In your efforts to show solidarity with those struggling in Rojava, has DAF encountered tensions between more authoritarian and less authoritarian structures within the defense? How are you engaging with them?**

As you have stated, no popular movement is homogenous. The importance of the Rojava Revolution is the revolutionary efforts that are becoming generalized. This is a mutual process in which the people of Rojava are becoming aware about social revolution and at the same time are shaping a social revolution. The YPG and YPJ are self-defense organizations created by the people. The character of both organizations has been criticized in many texts as authoritarian.

Similar discussions took place among comrades in the early 2000s in reference to the Zapatista movement. There were many critiques of the EZLN's authoritarian character in the Zapatista Revolution. Critiques about the character of the popular movements must take into account the political reality. As DAF, we would frame critiques on the process that are based on our experiences, and which are far from being prejudices about Kurdish movement. So there is no cooperation with any authoritarian structure, nor will any authoritarian structure play a role in social revolution.

In the United States, some anarchists have sometimes spoken of certain ethnic groups such as the people of Chiapas as if they are "culturally anarchist." Now some people here are speaking about the Kurdish people the same way. To us, although we do not want to render the struggles of oppressed peoples and colonized peoples invisible, it also seems simplistic and dangerous to confuse ethnic identity with politics. Likewise, our comrades in former Yugoslavia have expressed concerns over struggles that are based in ethnic or religious identity, on account of their experience of the 1990s civil war.

**How important is ethnic identity in the struggle in Rojava? Do you see this as a potential problem, or not?**

The Rojava Revolution is indeed made by peoples with at least four different ethnic and three different religious backgrounds, who are actively taking part equally in both military and social fronts. Also, the people of Rojava insist on being stateless, when there is already a neighboring Kurdish state in place. Kurdish ethnic identity has been subject to the denial and oppression policies of all the states in the region. Raising oppressed identities is strategically important in peoples' struggle for freedom, but not to the extent that it is a device of discrimination and deception. This balance is of key importance and the Rojava Revolution has already proved itself in this respect.

DAF also finds that the values that the people of Chiapas have created in their struggle for freedom align with anarchism, although "culturally anarchist" would not be a term we would use.

**Are there any other regions of the Middle East where social experiments like the one in Rojava are taking place, or where they might emerge? What would it take, internationally, for what is promising in Rojava to spread?**

The Rojava Revolution has been developing in a time when many socio-economic crises appeared around the world: Greece, Egypt, Ukraine... During the first period of the Arab Spring, the social opposition supported this "spring wave." After a while, these waves evolved into clashes between fundamentalists and secular militarist powers. So the revolution in Rojava appeared at a conjuncture when the social opposition had lost their hopes in the Middle East. Its own international character and international solidarity will spread this effort—first in the Middle East, then around the world.

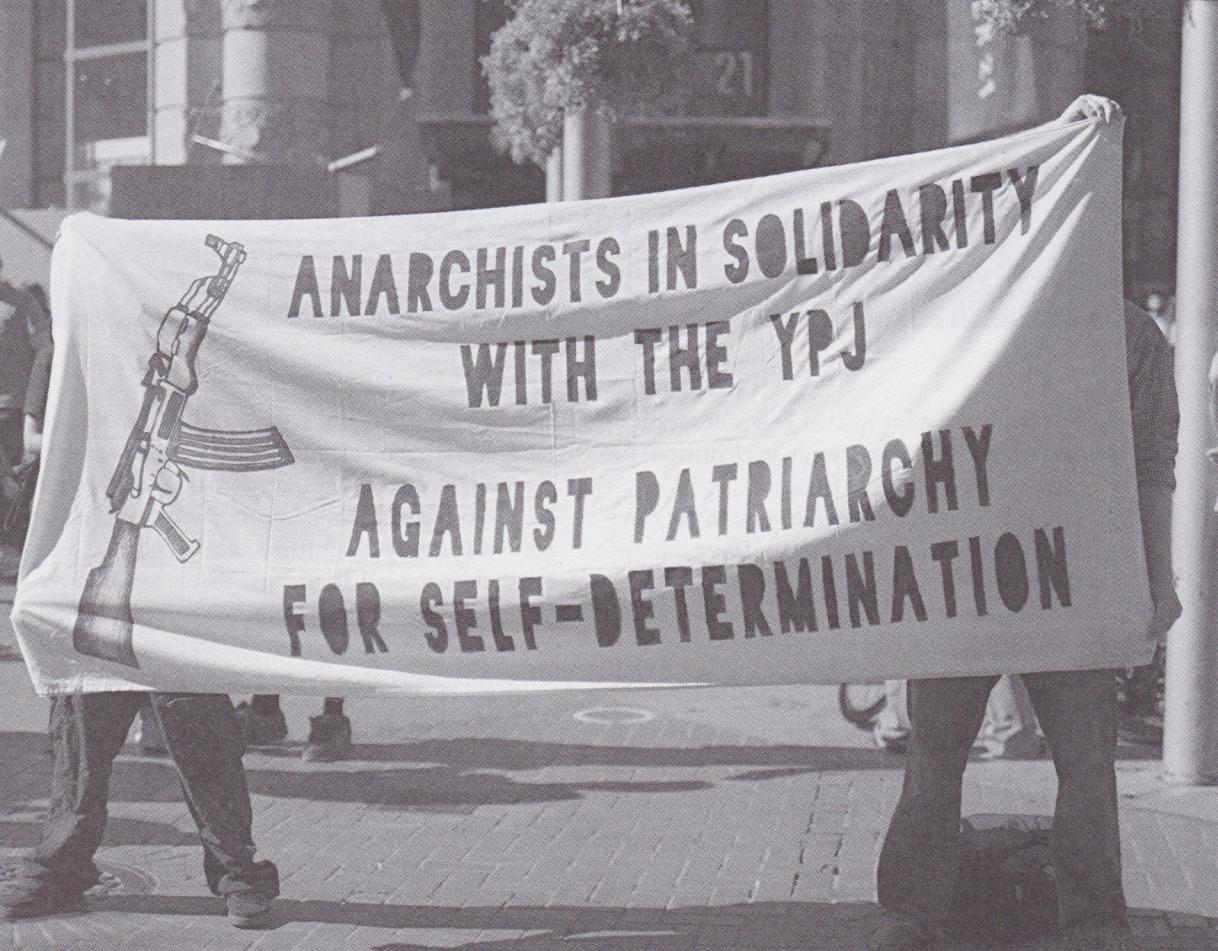
What does the conflict in Kobanê tell us about the kind of struggles ahead in the 21st century? It seems to be an early example of what might happen in “sacrifice zones” in which traditional state forces seal off the area and withdraw, leaving autonomous communities to do battle with new fundamentalist or neo-fascist post-state organizations. Do you see what is happening there as something new, or old? Or both?

As we stated above, this is a part of the process that started with the “spring waves.” It can be understood as a part of this theory of “sacrifice zones.” But this theory gives a great deal of importance to the character of international powers as subjects. We

also have to recognize the role of internal political, economic, and social forces. We have to check out the internal capital that has relations with fundamentalists against international capitalist powers.

Moreover, one of the biggest issues to understand the political culture of the Middle East is to recognize its unique character. Religion has a unique effect in the political agenda of the East. Not just for the Rojava Revolution, but across the board, DAF’s perspective on international politics is based in an understanding of relations of domination between social, economic, and political forces which cooperate and clash from time to time according to convenience, all of which are useless for oppressed people.

*Solidarity demonstration in the San Francisco Bay Area on October 11, 2014.*



# From Holding Cell to Cancer Ward

*The Nightmare of a Totally Managed Society*



I didn't really get what Michel Foucault meant by *biopower* until the night I went straight from the city jail to the hospital.

Foucault's idea is that at some point in the emergence of capitalism, *fostering life* became a more efficient strategy for accumulating power than *dealing death*. Whereas the sovereigns of old had left people well enough alone except when it was necessary to threaten them into obedience, the new power structures are explicitly concerned with refining and organizing the means by which to sustain populations.

What's wrong with that? Today, in the era of biopower, we take it for granted that the point of power structures is to sustain us. When we protest

against them, we do so on the grounds that they are harming rather than nourishing us. Demonstrating against global warming and police brutality, we call for governments that will halt climate change, police who will protect rather than shoot or choke us. But Foucault's point is that so long as they hold the power to *make us live*, they have the power to *let us die*. And not only that: both our lives and our deaths assume the forms designated by the authorities.

Don't take his word for it, though. Look at your own day-to-day experiences and see if the theory resonates. Here are some of mine.

It's December 2013, and I'm contributing to the advancement of medical science. In return for a few hundred dollars, I'm renting my body to a private pharmaceutical testing corporation so they can try out a new blood-coagulating agent on me. I've signed forms releasing the company from any liability should I experience lightheadedness, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, unconsciousness, or a host of other symptoms including death.

The intake procedures at the opening of the study illustrate the administrative dimension of biopower clearly enough. For the experiment to yield universally applicable data, it's necessary to maintain strict control over us.

"Have you had anything to eat since midnight last night?" inquires the nurse.

"As stipulated in the study requirements, no, I have not."

"Have you engaged in any form of exercise in the past 48 hours?"

"No."

"Have you ever been diagnosed with arthritis? Gingivitis? Abnormal bleeding or blood clotting?" She asked me these questions when I first applied for the study, but she has to ask me again every time I come in.

"No."

"Do you have asthma? Have you ever experienced an allergic reaction to any medication? Do you currently have a medical condition of any kind?"

"No, I've never had an allergic reaction to anything. I'm perfectly healthy."

"Have you ever experienced faintness while giving blood?"

"No." I can't say I'm exactly thrilled about having my blood drawn two dozen times over the next four days.

"Are you currently taking any medications or herbal supplements?"

"No," I lie. In fact, I applied for this study because I desperately need money for a root canal—but if I let on, they'll turn me back out on the street. I'm holding the pain at bay with the clove oil I've duct-taped to the inside of my thigh. *You motherfuckers think I'm here just to selflessly advance the cause of medical science?* The nurses searched my bag upon entry, but they didn't find my medicine—just a plastic fork, which they threw away so I wouldn't use it as a weapon or to consume food surreptitiously. Later, I learn that my fellow lab rats have smuggled in coffee, food, and medications of their own.

“Never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. But this formidable power of death now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive relations.”

-Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Capitalism isn't even good for pure science: the same conditions that compel us to sell our bodies to the industry strip us of any incentive to be honest with the researchers. This is a far cry from Jonas Salk experimenting on himself to develop the polio vaccine.

Two days pass. I'm locked in a windowless annex, my movements circumscribed to a hospital bed and the "confinement lounge." A battery of machines ceaselessly monitors my blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing; nurses regularly take my temperature and collect my blood and urine to be tested, quantified, evaluated. This is 21<sup>st</sup> century proletarian labor: my employer is not purchasing my labor power, but my very biology—not to produce material goods, but patented information. Salk didn't patent the polio vaccine.

When it's time to dose us, they wake us up at 5 am to strap pouches full of coagulant to our forearms, with IVs steadily releasing the drug into our bloodstreams. That familiar pulse of pain is beginning to pound in my jaw again. I go to the restroom, clove oil concealed in my sock, and turn out the light to apply it to my gumline—for all I know, there could be surveillance cameras concealed even here. Only in the darkness does the hospital disappear, leaving me alone with my clove oil and my pain.

I return to bed. I can see my neighbor's body laid out beside mine, though the plastic curtain conceals his head. His breathing surfaces and submerges within the rhythmless whir of the ventilation system. My own body is becoming habituated to this environment: when I lay down, I feel the rubber tourniquet around my bicep even when it isn't there, the ghost of the blood pressure pump tightening around my other arm.

At 7 am, the blood draws begin. The nurses call them "labs." A digital clock counts the seconds; at first, we'll have blood draws at five-minute intervals, then every ten minutes, then every thirty. Rather than using another IV, the nurses have to stick us with a new needle every time they draw. The blood draws are my least favorite part—the sensation of the needle punching through my skin makes my stomach clench.

The first blood draw goes fine. I look away as the nurse pushes the needle into my vein. The doctor supervising the trial has come in early to oversee this part of the procedure in person; he receives the vials of our blood at the door. He holds them up to the light, peering at them without acknowledging me or the other patients.

Five minutes later, the nurse pushes the needle into my arm again, next to the previous entry point

and all the bruised entry points of the past two days, itching as they heal. This time, she has to wiggle the needle around for a while to strike blood. Finally, she fills a vial of it, and turns it over to the doctor.

He returns a few seconds later, shaking his head. "It's unusable," he instructs her. "Draw another."

I look away from the nurse as she plunges the needle once more into my arm. All the other patients in the room are black men. The nurses in their blue smocks are all Latinas or white women with rural accents. Between the patients, the nurses, and the white doctor in his white coat, it's easy to make out the continuum between black flesh and white brains that still characterizes the racial distribution of the US workforce. The doctor is scowling at the latest vial of my blood. "This one is ruined, too," he says. "I need another draw."

The nurse explains that my blood is clotting before she can get a clean sample. She's sorry, but she needs to try a third time. *You motherfuckers, you knew you were testing a fucking blood coagulant on me, and now you're confused that my blood is coagulating? Fuck, is this my fault because of that clove oil?*

The draw succeeds—but only a minute passes before it is time for them to draw again. This time, the nurse has to work the needle around in my arm for several seconds to enter a vein, and then the blood stops flowing before she gets a full sample. She pulls the needle out and breaks my skin again. She's already made five holes, and this is the sixth—a tiny crimson Pleiades in the crook of my elbow.

*I'm trying to disassociate from the pain in my arm. One stick every five minutes sounded bad enough; now that I don't know how many sticks are ahead, I'm starting to panic. My head is a jumble of rage and recriminations. If only I'd made smarter decisions about how to market myself—if only I could maintain a positive attitude—if only I could put a gun to that fucking doctor's head and make them give me that paycheck up front! Pump that blood back into my arm, you fucking vampires, and throw in a dentist too if you don't want to leave here in a biohazard bag!*

Under the fluorescent lights, I can see my blood in the capsule beside me on the bed, resting on a gauze square like a tiny corpse—organic matter reduced to scientific evidence, or maybe just to medical garbage. My body is contained in this facility the way my blood is contained in that vial: it is measured by it, but also shaped by it. I realize that I'm about to black out.

"Are you OK?" All the nurses in the room are flocking around me. "You look pale." One of them puts her hands on my shoulder and bicep, massaging me, trying to get my blood to flow. It's a gesture

of care, and I appreciate it, even if its purpose here is just to get the machinery running again: like my blood in that vial, her empathy is shaped by the imperatives of this space, serving to advance that agenda. The nurse with the needle is still digging around inside my arm, chasing the vein across the muscles and tendons, breaking my skin again and again. Even if I lose consciousness, they can't afford to fall behind schedule.

Another nurse rushes in. "We're not getting anything from his EKG." They all look at me with mounting concern. "If your EKG doesn't work, we can't do the study." My heart, connected through my circulatory system to the needle and, beyond it, the whole medical-industrial complex, leaps in my rebel chest: *What I wouldn't give to leave this fucking study, to walk out right now! May every EKG fail and all the sick perish, if only my healthy body might be spared, if only I could walk out of this hospital into a world without dental bills!*

But I have to force myself to stay here, the doctor in my head coercing the subject of my body to serve the economy. If I don't, I can't get the root canal.

What better argument is there for our civilization than the wonders of modern medical science? Yet, at this moment, that apparently universal good is inflicting personal injury on me. I've spent much of my life doing studies like this to pay the bills; it strikes me that, were I to tally everything up, I might find that modern medicine has done me more harm than good. The Environmental Protection Agency has locked me in chambers filled with pollutants. The pharmaceutical industry has pumped poisons into my bloodstream. The doctors whose oath is "First, do no harm" have overseen all this, indifferently entering data into spreadsheets.

As the nurse forces yet another needle into my arm, I no longer identify with the abstract humanity that is to benefit from all this research. I identify with the inmates of Stateville prison hospital who were infected with malaria to test investigational drugs. I identify with the teenagers of the Ohio Soldiers and Sailors Orphanage upon whom toxic vaccines were tested. I identify with the black sharecroppers in whom the US Public Health Service allowed syphilis to progress untreated, observing its effects as they sickened and died without ever informing them of their condition. I identify with the billions of animals tortured by vivisection, the vast foundation of carcasses on which the pyramid of the medical industry rests. I'm still not sure exactly what biopower is, but I feel in my gut that I'm against it.

A few days later, I'm back out on the streets, surrounded by hundreds of people chanting and beating drums. Another young man of color has died at the hands of the city police—the fourth in this city in five months. This time it's a Latino teenager, Jesus Huerta, "Chuy" to his friends. When he left home one night, his mother was afraid that he was running away. She called the police to go find him and bring him back—tragically taking their motto "to serve and protect" at face value. He arrived at the police station dead of a gunshot wound.

The police maintain that he smuggled a gun with him into the back of the police car and, with his hands still cuffed behind his back, shot himself in the head. In response to public outcry and disbelief, they've announced that in fact, this is a popular way to commit suicide—though based on the examples they cite, it chiefly seems to occur in Texas. One police department has even released an instructional video on how to shoot yourself in the head while handcuffed, provided the handcuffs are as loose as they are on the officer in the video.

Those same police are lining our demonstration now, hundreds of bike cops flanking us, riot cops in full armor, lieutenants filming us, motorcycle cops gunning their motors in the intersections. When we stop at the place Chuy died so his family can set out candles and say a prayer, the police issue a dispersal order through a megaphone and prepare to attack us. It's a tense moment: the officers pulling down their gas masks and readying their weapons, the tearful faces of the family in prayer, some of us in black sweatshirts steeling ourselves to defend them with our fragile banners and bodies.

Just before the final order is given to charge us, we resume marching. Now the police are jostling their bikes into us, screaming orders at us. They are the antibodies of the political system, surrounding the contagion of social unrest—intent on isolating it from the rest of the social body and neutralizing it by any means necessary. They aren't simply concerned with preserving our biological existence, but with enforcing their biological metaphor of health: the smooth functioning of the existing system. That explains the line of police separating us from the good citizens spending their hard-earned money in the restaurants, just as I spent my paycheck at the dentist. All this infrastructure that is supposed to serve life, to protect life, serves to protect and enforce a certain kind of life, and no other. We have to accept that the police are taking the *right* lives—the lives of the black, brown, and expendable—or else we might be the next target.



We reach the destination of the march. It's a relief. We will exchange farewells and condolences and phone numbers, and return to our lives as presumably law-abiding good citizens—at least, those of us who are not always on the receiving end of the sort of violence that took Chuy from us. But suddenly, without warning, the police are charging, shooting volleys of tear gas into the crowd. Choking parents stumble back blindly, trying to drag their children to safety. A wall of riot police with batons rams into us: "MOVE! BACK! MOVE! BACK!" they chant, like testosterone-powered robots. I interpose myself between the threshing line and the other protesters,

hoping to buy my comrades enough time to get their children to safety. The officers are striking us, methodically, but they will not meet our eyes. Then everything goes white and the world dissolves in a stinging fog.

Surely, that tear gas closing my throat and flattening my lungs was tested in a medical facility like the one I just worked in. Doctors administered tests and recorded results; scientists refined their theories, confident that they were contributing to the advancement of humanity. The more total the understanding of the human body and its functions, the more precisely it can be controlled—whether



that means extending life, ending life, or imposing a form upon it and correcting deviations. Some contrary part of me wishes I had done more to cheat than just smuggling in clove oil.

The next morning, there's some fallout in the press. Youtube videos show law-abiding citizens opening the windows of their downtown apartments to see what is happening, only to choke on the tear gas wafting in. Shouldn't the police be more restrained, more targeted, more precise? But the critical editorials in the newspaper offer me little reassurance. The more targeted the police are, the more restrained they appear to all the good citizens

going about their ordinary business, the less their actions will provoke outrage—and the easier it will be for them to kill young men of color with impunity. If the police were able to identify those who were committing specific violations of the law and utilize precise biological weapons that only affected them, these concerned journalists would have no grounds for their complaints. The smooth functioning of the police itself is the problem—it is not just that it kills some people, or that it represses others, but that it fosters a society in which no one can imagine or enact any other form of social relations.

I'm starting to understand what biopower means.

Fast-forward a year to December 2014. The police have killed another—no, two—no, hundreds more young men of color. We’re back out downtown, more of us now, a great angry crowd chanting and beating drums and shooting flares into the night sky. This time, we’re blocking the freeway. Illuminated only by the headlights behind us, we are slowly marching from one exit to the next, leaving graffiti on the pillars of overpasses as police helicopters circle overhead. We are shutting down the circulatory system of the body politic, interrupting the smooth functioning of the order that sustains us. It seems like the only way to get any leverage on it.

I almost didn’t come tonight. My partner is in the hospital with cancer; she’s had an operation and still can’t keep down fluids. I’ve been staying there with her all week, sleeping with my face pressed into the sticky patent leather of the chair at her bedside, emphasizing my presence and care as she fights against nausea, against the relentless stabbing pain in her abdomen, against despair.

Supporting someone with cancer is a little like taking on white supremacy as a white person. There is nothing you can possibly do that would suffice to solve the problem. You have to give everything you have, humbly and without expectation, knowing it will never be enough. I reach across the machinery of the automated bed to hold her hand as she struggles to breathe, summoning warmth and optimism to sustain her despite my own mounting fatigue. She’s angry with me for all the ways I am failing her, just as my friends who are poorer and darker-skinned than I am are angry with me for not doing more to challenge the system that benefits me at their expense. They’re right to be angry. It’s unjust.

She had an uncomfortable feeling in her stomach for a year. It took us that long to navigate the bureaucracy of the health care system. The government just overhauled the way insurance coverage works in the US, but in the end it didn’t help us at all—people in her income bracket are supposed to be covered by Medicaid, which doesn’t apply in our state. And all that time, the cancer was growing inside her, drawing in resources, spreading from one organ to another like a bureaucracy extending its reach.

The worst part of being ill in this society is not just the fear of death, but the shame of being a broken thing—an object that can no longer produce, no longer pay its way. She can’t stop thinking about the inconvenience to everyone else, how she can’t go to the bank or take care of the water bill or even get to

the bathroom without someone to roll the IV drip alongside her. In the hospital, you feel the stark line of demarcation between the healthy and the sick, between doctors and patients, machinery and flesh, clean and unclean, sacred and profane. I never feel that way with my herbalist friends. Their tinctures don’t always work, that clove oil did precious little to soothe my dying tooth, but their care emphasizes that I am precious to them, that I have nothing to be ashamed of—that I don’t have to be productive or integrated into a bureaucracy for my life to matter.

We’re a block from the highway when the police charge. They’ve had a year to refine their procedures, to become more precise, more targeted, more surgical. Ordinarily, they arrest black and brown youth at the edge of demonstrations, but tonight they wait until our numbers have dwindled, and then they sprint directly for the ones they think hold the most social power. The first person they grab is the medic—I see him three steps behind me, plaintively mouthing “Help me!” as three of them swing him to the pavement, tearing off the equipment with which he would turn medical care against the establishment it ordinarily serves. Another officer tackles me from behind at full gallop, slamming me to the ground so we roll over each other until his colleagues secure a zip-tie around my wrists.

On the bus, my hands contorted behind me against the seat, the zip-tie cuts into my skin. At least it beats an IV needle—or a bullet.

The intake procedures at the station are monotonous and familiar. My arresting officer copies down my biometrics: height, weight, date of birth, distinguishing features. Do I have any former arrests in this county? Do I have any tattoos or distinctive markings? They scan my fingerprints and palms. I lie to them, saying I have no tattoos, and refuse to answer their questions. The officer is trying to make small talk with me. I keep my mouth shut: anything I say *can and will be used against me in a court of law*. Just as the compassion of the nurses greased the wheels of the medical study, his conversational banter has been integrated into the intelligence-gathering apparatus of the state.

Sitting in the cell, the internal recriminations resume. I told my partner I would be back at eleven, and now who knows when I’ll get out of here. Here I am, irresponsible again, failing to come through for the person I love when her life is on the line. Instead of standing up for the lives—no, for the deaths—of people I never knew, I should have kept my head down, looking out for myself and my family, individual solutions for individual problems. I should be grateful, right? Grateful that my lover can

be the beneficiary of such an advanced civilization, with all its medical technology.

No, actually, fuck that. Fuck the nurses, fuck the doctors, fuck the dentists, fuck the journalists, fuck the police, fuck all the good citizens behind the windows of the restaurants and automobiles, and fuck integrating myself into their logic of how power should be distributed, who deserves to survive. Trapped here while my partner waits in the hospital, it suddenly strikes me that cancer and police are parallel manifestations of the same thing. They both impose limits on how we can realize our potential, circumscribing what our lives can be. They both appear inevitable—*death and taxes*. But at least one of them is a needless tragedy, unnecessary and ridiculous. We're bound to die, one way or another, but we don't have to live like this.

Some people say we're stupid to blockade highways, to disobey orders, to get in the way of how things work. They can't imagine things working any differently—they can't even pose the question of what another world might look like, and therein lies the ultimate triumph of the police. When such people picture social change, they can only imagine the existing apparatus of power functioning more efficiently, more effectively. They propose to abolish white supremacy by means of the institutions created to enforce it; they propose to do the same for climate change and authoritarian power itself.

Entering the hospital straight from the jail, I am struck by how similar they are. My body reacts to the dry aseptic air, to the sterile walls of the hospital foyer hung with motivational posters and grade-school art, the same way it did to the windowless corridors of the police station. I feel clenched up, hunted, hyperalert. Both of these environments are designed to minimize your agency, rendering you a spectator of your own fate, managed and directed by specialists. Both of them conceal the objects of their operations—disobedience and death, respectively—in order to set you at a distance from everything within you that cannot be integrated into the regime of biopower. Together, they force a biological metaphor onto social life, and vice versa: defining and excising the broken, the dependent, the destructive, the criminal.

I sneak past the security guard who would ask for my pass if he noticed me arriving at this late hour—I have no pass and it's too late to get one. I take the elevator to the sixth floor and make my way around the night nurse at the desk. I slip the door open quietly and creep through the darkness to take my partner's hand. She is semiconscious in the dim glow of digital displays, beautiful even at the precipice of

death, in defiance of the cancers within and around her and the machines into which her body is integrated as if it were just a defective machine itself. Fighting the urge to weep, I apologize for being late. Blurrily, she asks me how the demonstration went, whether everyone is OK. Yes, I tell her, *Everything went fine. Everyone is OK.*

Afterwards, the police claim that in blocking the highway, we delayed an ambulance on its way to the hospital. I joke that they keep an ambulance on hand alongside their fleet of personnel carriers and tactical vehicles just so they can be sure we'll always be blocking one—but there's a bigger issue at the bottom of this. They take life, and the system is ordered in such a way that we endanger life when we try to discourage them from doing so. It is life that is at stake here, for certain, on their side and ours—the question is whose lives, and what kind of living. When we fill the highway with our unruly flesh, slowing the traffic that is pumping pollution into the atmosphere and hastening climate catastrophe, they can convincingly argue that we are the ones endangering life, because it is their system that nourishes it, even as they take it away. Every other way of surviving has been closed off by that same system.

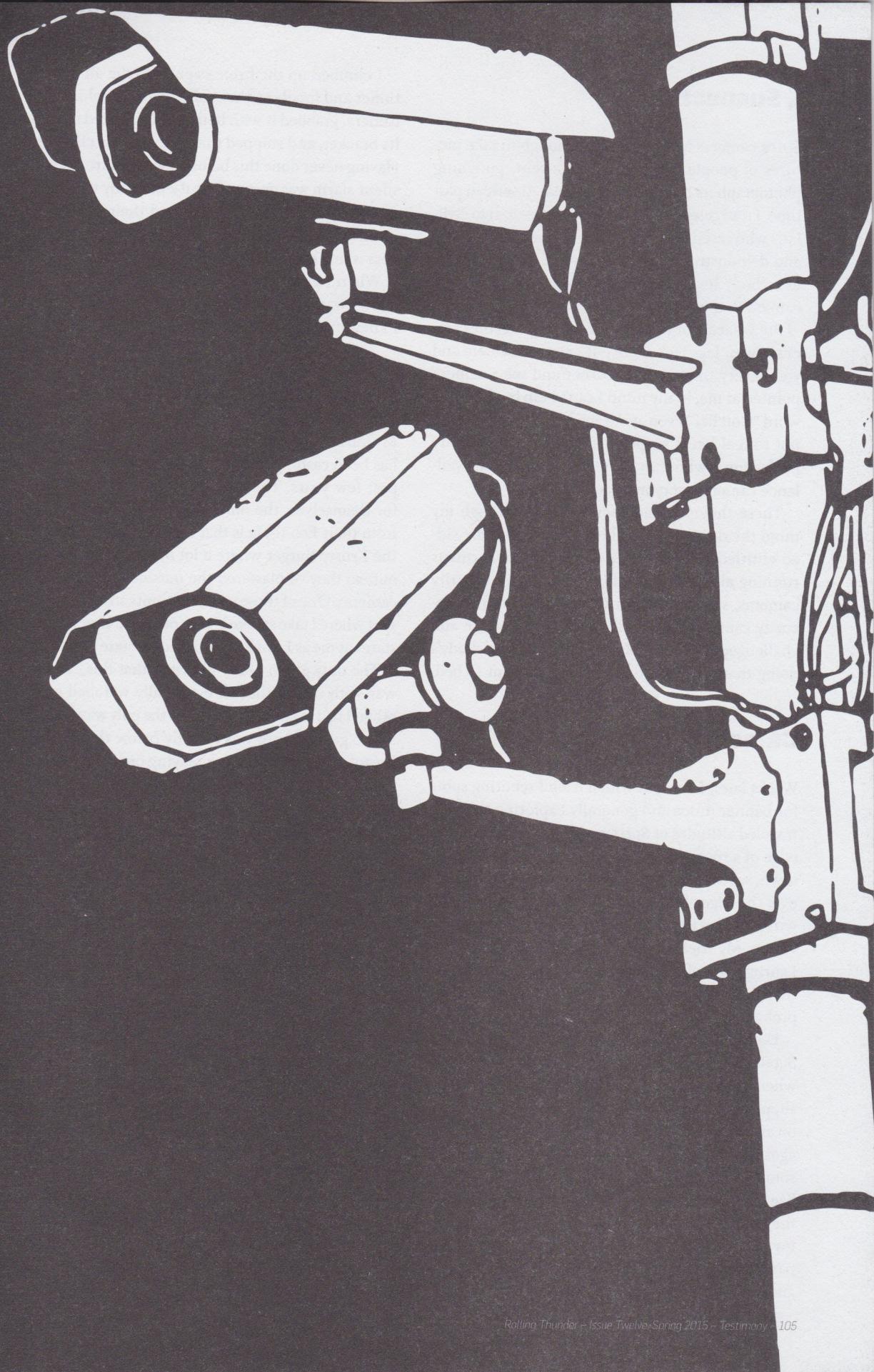
And now, finally, I'm clear on what biopower is. Biopower is a network of interlinking institutions in which the things that sustain us become inextricable from the things that control and kill us. That's why it is so insidious: because we can't resist it without opting, like Mohamed Bouazizi, for some kind of self-destruction. Biopower coordinates all life in a single vast apparatus, maximizing productivity, ceaselessly compelling us to mobilize ourselves according to its logic. From its perspective, the freedom we seek is indistinguishable from catastrophe; from our perspective, the same must be said of the ruling order.

I'm not proposing a grand alternative. I don't have a universal system to argue for, or a new blueprint according to which to reorder society. Maybe universals are part of the problem. All I have is the inkling that, speaking from my immediate personal experience, no system of management will foster the lives we deserve. Disentangling our means of survival from all the institutions of management has never been more difficult, nor more pressing. And yeah, it's terrifying.

# Blinding the Cyclops/ Wrecking the Panopticon

## *Camera Hunting in the Metropolis*

**A narrative of personal warfare against the  
surveillance state, surely fictional, submitted  
anonymously to the CrimethInc. ex-Workers'  
Collective by Seldom Seen Simpson**



## I, Suspect

Since cameras became mobile enough to take pictures of people without their consent, punching photographers has become the great American pastime. From celebrities hounded by paparazzi to civilians who resent news teams invading their privacy and demonstrators who don't want to be profiled, everybody loves swinging on a person shoving a camera in their face.

But what about when the person shoving the camera in your face isn't there—it's just the camera and you? Every time I turn a corner and see a camera pointed at me, in my mind I can't help but hear the word "Gotcha!" Even at our most innocent, it's hard not to feel like a suspect. Indeed, to the security professional who sees the world through a surveillance camera, everyone is a suspect.

These thoughts had been running through my mind the day that I stumbled upon a YouTube video entitled "Camover 2013." I watched Germans running all over their city, tearing down security cameras, smashing security cameras, painting security cameras. They said it was a new game and challenged others to join in. "I'm glad somebody's doing that," I thought to myself, and went to bed.

## Camera 1

Weeks later, I was out with a friend scouting spots for banner drops and generally exploring the less-traveled altitudes of Springfield. As we came to the edge of a roof overlooking the main strip of downtown, we saw that we were not alone. Also looking over the edge of the building was a security camera, wires leading into a hole in the wall to God-knows-where. My friend commented on the camera, but I shrugged it off and changed the subject, deciding that if I was going to come back for it, I should probably not let on.

Every Sunday, my friends gather to watch Itchy and Scratchy. I really couldn't care less about the show, so when Sunday came, I said I had to clean my room, slipped out, and went back to my house. There I put on an old windbreaker that somebody had left there ages ago, black cotton gloves, a baseball cap, and some dark blue jeans. I grabbed a canvas shopping bag and put into it some wire cutters I'd taken from the supply closet at work earlier that week. I rode my bike to a spot a couple blocks from the target, parked it there, and approached on foot, hood up and hat pulled low to avoid other security cameras.

I climbed up the fire escape onto the air conditioner and finally to the roof. I crept up behind the camera, grabbed it with both hands, twisted it from its bracket, and snipped the wire with my clippers. Having never done this before, I wasn't sure if some silent alarm was going off or if somebody watching a screen somewhere had just had their creep-fest interrupted, so I hastily shoved the camera and clippers in my bag and retreated to my bike.

When I got home, I was wired on adrenaline. I knew I was going to do this again next weekend and I knew exactly which camera it would be.

## Cameras 2 and 3

My job is right next door to a green yuppie cafe that has been cashing in on the local foods trend of the past few years. The owners are doing pretty well for themselves; the only thing holding them back from their Eco-topia is that they are located beside the Krusty Burger where a lot of black youth hang out, so they've plastered the outside with security cameras. One of those cameras points straight at the spot where I take smoke breaks out back. Every day, it stares at me as I smoke and try not to stare back at it.

The only glitch in my plan was that this camera was with others that all essentially watched each other. I had to get to the roof, but the only way I could see to get up there was directly below the camera I wanted. I spent all week playing out scenarios in my head; by the time Itchy and Scratchy came on, I almost felt like I'd done this many times before. I excused myself, got on my bike, parked a block away, and proceeded on foot.

Before I got to the site, I hid behind a fence and tied a bandanna over my face. Even with the hat and hood, I'd felt a little uneasy the last time—the twisting and breaking of the camera bracket had happened so quickly that, thinking back, I couldn't really be sure I hadn't accidentally pointed it at myself before clipping the wires. What if the last thing a person reviewing the tape had seen was my stupid face? Probably that hadn't happened, but the point was that any mistakes I made would be recorded.

Masked up, I approached quickly, moved a stack of chairs behind the café to the wall, and climbed past the camera. Once on the roof, I made a quick detour to another camera that pointed into the same alley, snipped the wire, and twisted it till the bracket broke, then repeated this process on the first camera. Then I climbed back down and, for some reason, put the chairs back where I'd found them.

I biked away, stowed the cameras off site, and changed clothes. Then I went to the bar across the street and waited to see if the cops came. I wanted to know if cameras were hooked up to alarms. None came.

## Conspiracy of One

I was hooked. I spent each week plotting, mentally rehearsing, for Itchy and Scratchy time. Two notable mental shifts occurred at this point.

First, my interactions with security cameras changed. Before, if I rounded a corner to see the red circle of LEDs that features on the front of most modern cameras, I might have reflected on how it looked remarkably like Hal from *2001: A Space Odyssey* and then walked on grumbling about industrial capitalism's increasing encroachments on my privacy, feeling generally violated. Now, when I saw that camera, I immediately began evaluating the best way to remove it.

The second shift was that this changed how I spent my mental free time. It put other parts of the week in perspective. Anytime I was on a mindless task at work, my thoughts would move to that week's target. This made the tasks that then required my full attention an annoyance. But on the other hand, things that I would previously have found irritating, like bad drivers, stupid customers, or breaking or losing possessions, could obtain no foothold in my thoughts. I had a mission.

## Disaster Relief: Cameras 4, 5, and 6

Winter began, pushing me indoors. Like many parts of the country, we had an "extreme" winter. I looked out my window, listening to the radio imploring people to go home and not drive anywhere. I looked forward to the warmer weather returning so I could go out and play again. I watched videos of the Ukrainian uprising. People outside, fighting the police, using homemade catapults to hurl Molotov cocktails over the barricades. Barricades made of... snow. The video showed them packing burlap sacks full of snow and I realized the obvious. These people were fighting all day and night in the middle of Russian winter. How comfortable I suddenly felt—too comfortable! I needed to push myself. It occurred to me: as the populace watched Netflix with their heat blasting, and police tended to car accidents and other weather-related 911 calls, anyone who would

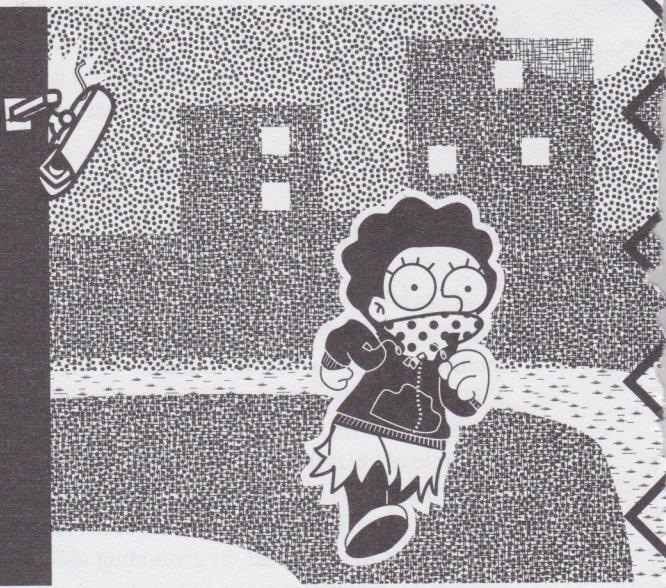
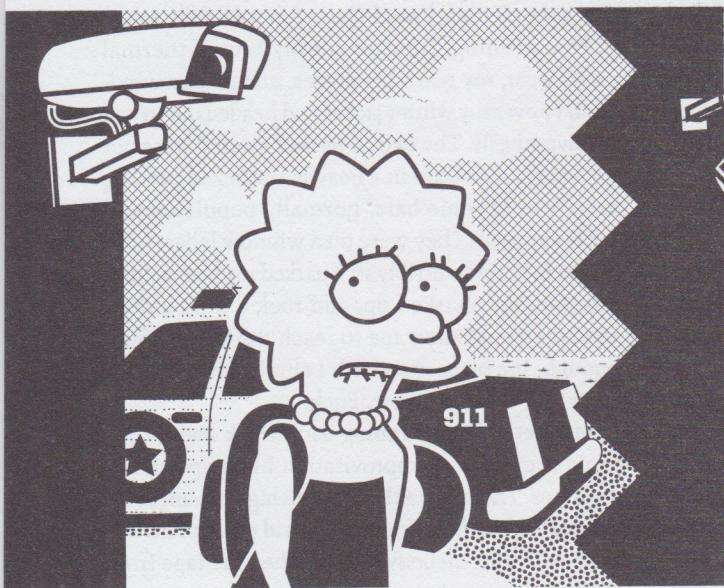
brave the elements would have full run of the town.

That evening, I put on all my sets of thermal underwear, my scarf, big gloves, and a large windbreaker over my winter jacket and headed out to test my hypothesis. The two cameras I wanted were not on a main street but in a heavily trafficked parking area behind some bars, normally populated and fairly exposed. They were on a window ledge—out of reach, but not terribly so. I parked my bike behind a restaurant, masked up, and took a milk crate I thought would allow me to reach the targets. Sure enough, the place was dead. I climbed on the milk crate and came up short. Fuck.

My meticulous planning each week had let me avoid the stress of improvisation in compromised positions. There was a third, much higher camera for a different business, for which I had other plans at a later date. If somebody had watched the tape from that camera on that night, here is what he would have seen: A black marshmallow with a bandanna over its face approaches the pair of cameras, places a milk crate on the ground beneath them, pulls out a pair of wire cutters and reaches for the cameras, fails to reach them, hops down, and looks around frantically. Said black marshmallow then proceeds to run around to every restaurant and bar in the alley and eventually drags a wooden pallet from behind one of them, leans it against the wall, and climbs up to the cameras, snips the wires, and attempts to twist the first camera from its bracket. The camera remains firmly affixed to the window sill; the marshmallow places both feet on the wall below the camera and wrenches back and forth with full upper torso until the camera finally comes loose, sending the marshmallow flying backwards, nearly landing on its ass. The marshmallow gets up, frantically looks around, and proceeds to attempt the same maneuver on the other camera.

It's hard to gauge time in moments like this, but I am quite certain that at this point it had taken at a matter of minutes, in contrast to my previous actions which had certainly all been a matter of seconds. As I had both feet pressed against the wall and was pulling with both hands, my eyes fell on a small hand screw at the joint where the camera meets the bracket. Duh. Back to the view from the third camera: Marshmallow stops wrenching back and forth, puts feet back on wooden pallet, calmly unscrews camera, climbs down, returns wooden pallet, and walks away.

A few days later, an ice storm hit, paralyzing the city, and I was back out, this time on a highly-visible roof during what should have been rush hour—instead, it was a ghost town covered in a sheet of



ice as far as the eye could see. And there I was, holding onto a satellite dish for balance, kicking a camera from above. I couldn't wait till flood season.

## Location, Location, Location

Beyond simply getting the easy ones first, figuring out which cameras to remove seemed to warrant a plan. I'd decided that I should avoid appearing on any camera during my little excursions, due to the nature of the crime. It was easy to determine the exact time it was committed by watching the video, and other camera owners might well be sympathetic and cooperate to help track who had been in the area around that time. Also, if at some point this behavior pattern was designated *political*—because a communiqué appeared, or as a result of astute police work—federal money would become available for an investigation. This greatly limited my range of motion and list of potential targets.

I was immediately reminded of one of the rules of guerrilla warfare: every action should give you the ability to do something you could not do before. It was with this in mind that I decided I would create “privacy corridors” in my town: paths one could take without appearing on camera.

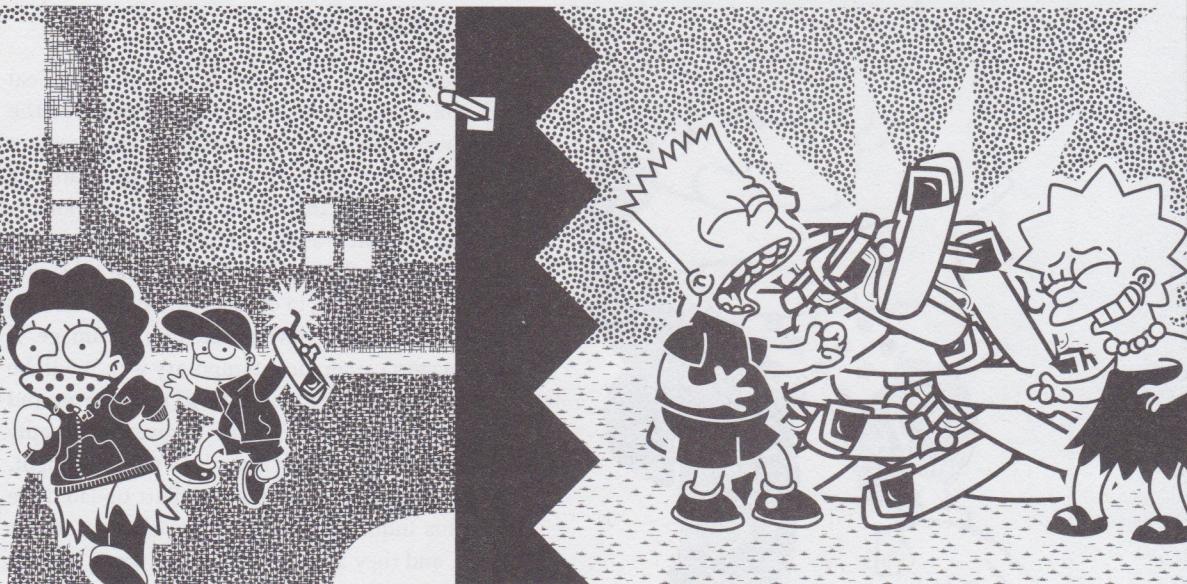
## Future Primitive

I walked through a different world. My solitary secret made me feel like a superhero, or a villain.

When I see cameras staring at me today, I still feel that initial anxiety. Studies have shown that humans behave very differently when they know they are being watched; they try harder to conform to social norms, not to stand out. They become anxious and irritable, yet ultimately they adapt emotionally, accepting the surveillance and anxiety as normal. I too have always behaved this way: eyes forward, keep walking, unconsciously weighing how my every movement might be interpreted. But now it's different: after the initial moment of anxiety, I remember that I am undercover, plotting, watching back.

In an increasingly complex society, the space for individual deviation becomes smaller and smaller as more conformity is demanded of us. I don't mean superficial forms of expression like dress style, musical taste, recreational drug use, or even religion and sexual preference—those are tolerated, so long as they are practiced in ways that don't disrupt production, consumption, or social control. I mean rather that our freedom of movement, our freedom to express ourselves by acting upon the world, our very autonomy—these are greatly curtailed. Our minds adjust to these new limited sets of options: *employment, charity, starvation; or buy, rent, be homeless; or be observed, hide away, comply and be ignored*.

But sometimes our minds and bodies remember that there was once another set of options: *self-defense, attack, destroy*. And it was in these options that I found dignity. When I act for the cameras now, my smile is genuine, not forced. I know I will be back to destroy them.



## Double Down: Cameras 7 and 8

I loved working alone. It felt safe, but it also felt strong, figuring out how to do things and executing plans that required serious judgment calls with real consequences without running them by anybody else, just trusting myself.

So I'd be hard pressed to tell you why I decided to bring a second person on. Perhaps I thought I needed a lookout for some of the more audacious actions I hoped to accomplish; perhaps I just needed to get out of my own head with the whole thing and get a little perspective. Either way, I decided to approach Bart. I trusted him, and he'd made some comments about wanting to act in a similar way. I had originally feigned disinterest, the way I always did when the subject of cameras came up.

He was excited about my invitation. For practice, I took him to an abandoned strip mall that still had its cameras intact and questionably operational. I wanted him to learn the motions outside of a stressful situation so that he could focus on our surroundings during missions, avoiding awkward situations like my last couple outings.

We hid in the bushes and masked up and then quickly approached from behind the first camera. Bart stepped in my hands and I pushed upward. He put his hands on the wall to stabilize himself. "Now use the clippers to cut the cord, and then just pull on the camera and see if it'll break."

"It won't."

"OK, perhaps there's a hand screw at the joint which will just come undone?"

Silence. "Got it!" He hopped down. We did another and went home.

## Bart and Lisa Hit the Streets: Camera 9

A few nights later I brought Bart out on a simple mission I'd been planning but had to keep putting off because the bar kept later hours than I did. Once I finally found a night they were closed, the task was a breeze. We kept our hoods up and hats low as we approached the building, then climbed the chain link fence against the back and onto the roof. We circled behind the camera, masked up, did one more "Anatomy of a Camera," cut the wires, shoved it in my jacket pocket, climbed down, and exited the area before removing our gloves, and hoods.

We wandered through a back neighborhood route toward my house. "Wanna try one more? An experiment?" I asked.

"Yeah, sounds great." The camera I wanted was at the entrance of a parking lot, face level, commanding a view of where cars came in but also of the sidewalk. It was covered by a glass dome to hide which direction it pointed.

I produced a hammer from my jacket pocket. "Let me run this plan by you: we circle around, mask up in the back corner of the lot, approach from behind, you keep your eyes peeled because traffic is pretty



steady, I'll strike the bulb with the hammer, it'll break, I'll try to rip out the camera, and then if that doesn't work, I'll just bash it a few times with the hammer. We'll jog back across the street into the neighborhood. Any objections or modifications?"

"I'm in."

Communicating what I wanted to do and putting it up for debate felt strange, emotionally. I felt like this was my project—and with so much at stake, was I ready to take another person's input? I suppose if he'd said no or we couldn't agree on one plan, I could have returned another night to do it solo. We followed each step of the plan, but when I swung the hammer it glanced off the dome. I swung again and it glanced off again. I stepped around to get a direct shot and hit the dome head-on with the hammer. It bounced back at me as if I'd struck rubber. We paused, shrugged, did the best we could to wipe off the scuffmarks advertising our failed attempt, and jogged away, unmasking behind a building.

## Camover Lab

We discussed the possibilities as to how to deal with the dome. We ruled out fire because of the disproportionate penalties associated with arson in the United States. We also ruled out just painting the dome because that would only be temporary; we want the cameras fully destroyed. Contrary to some texts circulating on the issue that advocate paint, snipping wires, or even just gluing plastic bags over the lenses, I believe in maximum damage. If we damage a camera in a temporary way, it will be fixed quickly and we may have to return over and over. This is pattern behavior: it gives the enemy the chance to adapt, and that's how you get caught.

While we were out one night, Bart updated me about his inquiries. "I did some research on the domes, and they advertise as vandal proof. There's a promotional video where they run it over with a car and try to set it on fire. The screws all require proprietary bits to remove. But there is a tool for working with the material the dome is made out of. It's long, slim, and sharp and available online so we could buy it anonymously with a Visa gift card..." but I still wouldn't know where to get it sent to."

We decided to table the subject for the time being. Meanwhile, I'd been developing my own special tool and was excited to test it in the field. I'd been in Conglomo-Mart's camping section when I'd stumbled across a small device called the "Commando Saw." It was a few rough wires twisted together with cloth finger loops at either end. I shoved it down my pants, put fifty feet of paracord in my pocket, and walked out.

When I got home, I cut two twelve-foot sections from the paracord and tied them to the loops on each end of the "Commando Saw," adding a heavy steel link at one end. I pictured myself throwing the link over a camera, adjusting it so the wire saw was directly on top, and then pulling the strings back and forth to saw through the hard plastic bracket.

I explained the tool to Bart and he got excited. "Perfect! I've been watching a spot that you mentioned to me last week, and foot traffic dies there shortly after the mall closes. The cameras are out of reach, but this new tool would be great."

## Springfield Under Siege: Cameras 10, 11, 12 and 13

We approached the mall well after closing, but early enough that a show at the bar next door would drown out any suspicious noises we might make. We stood

on either side of the first camera. I let out a little cord and threw the steel link over the camera. My angle was wrong; it bounced off the wall, but Bart caught it before it noisily hit the metal grate below us. "Good save! Can you be ready to do that again?"

We repeated that a couple times until I finally got the steel link over the camera. I let out a little more cord until the saw was on top of the metal bracket, then I changed the plan. "Let's see what happens if we just pull."

"OK. 1, 2, 3!" We both gave a hard tug and the wire saw broke in half, re-angling the camera upward in the process.

"Fuck." I'd broken my new toy by using it wrong and had no backup plan. I thought for a moment. "Let's see if the remaining cord is long enough to just throw over and pull it down, since the paracord is stronger". I had previously assumed that the brackets couldn't possibly be flimsy enough to pull down with some thin, non-static cord—that's why I'd developed the elaborate saw device.

I was wrong. The camera came away easily when we pulled. Bart grabbed the camera and ripped it free of the wires that still attached it to the building.

"Want to do the other or call it a night?" I asked.

"Let's get it!" Now getting the hang of the cord with steel link, I easily tossed it over the second camera, which came down as easily as the first. Normally, I would have gone home at this point. Go out, hit a spot, go home, that was my trend; it was conservative but safe. But this is where I learned the true value of working with others: it's fun and you push each other. While some tasks may seem like a one-person job, two people's worth of courage and audacity may make them more likely to happen quickly. Instead of going home we went and did two more rooftop cameras and I fell asleep feeling amazing.

## Think Global, Smash Local

We heard later through the grapevine that the employees at the mall had been gossiping and speculating about what had happened to the cameras. It occurred to me that every business where we'd destroyed cameras probably had a boss who was angry, possibly even feeling threatened, but also had employees that surely noticed that the cameras were gone and either didn't care or thought it was funny. No doubt when the bosses called the police, they replied, "Yeah, we've had a string of these lately," and so the rumors spread...

Irrational as it was, I sometimes felt bad for the people whose cameras we destroyed. Some were

small business owners who probably imagined that whoever broke their camera might come back later to rob them or whatever. It's important to remember that individual people needn't act in malice to help build a totalitarian system; in fact, that's almost never how such systems are built. If each camera is part of a larger system of cameras that effectively monitors us every time we leave our homes, does it matter who put each one there? Would any of those people resist if the footage were subpoenaed by the police state? Would it even take a subpoena, or would they just hand it over like good citizens? Does it even matter, since most CCTV is hooked up to the internet, and we know that the NSA and by extension every other government agency has access to nearly everything on the internet—so that these are, for all intents and purposes, NSA cameras? Each owner is just tending his little plot in a system of surveillance feudalism.

## Anonymity Loves Company: Cameras 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18

Any apprehensions I'd had about bringing in a second person were gone. Bart had hit the ground running, doing research, reconnaissance and—making me a little nervous—dropping five cameras on his own the same week we had done the other four.

"I would never say you shouldn't do cameras on your own—but consider slowing down a bit, we want to be able to keep doing this. We've definitely got to go kind of hard if we want to make a dent at all, but leaving irregular periods of inactivity between jobs will greatly increase our chances of not getting caught. I don't want to hold anybody back



from smashing every camera in the world, but pace yourself so we can be in it for the long run."

I also talked to him about my personal policy of not wandering around on a night I was going to attack cameras, so there would be no recordings of me in the area. "I know it seems a little overcautious for each individual act of misdemeanor vandalism, but if at some point they pick up the pattern and label it some sort of activism, federal investigation money will come pouring in and we won't be sorry we played it safe."

## Unfinished Business: Cameras 19, 20, 21 and 22

Determined to keep working on the so-called vandalism-proof cameras, I went to Lowe's and took a hammer and the biggest chisel I could find.

We crouched and masked up behind a closed business across the street, double-checked our tools, and put our gloves on. What had looked ordinary in winter looked criminally absurd in the hot and humid summer night. We waited for a break in the sparse traffic of stragglers still making their way home from the closed bars. The only people out at that hour were drunks, taxis, cops, and criminals.

We sprinted across the street to the target. I put the chisel's tip to the dome and struck the butt repeatedly with the hammer. Over and over I swung, at least a dozen times. The electrical box it was affixed to let out a loud low boom with every strike; deep pock-marks appeared in a cluster on the surface of the dome, but the chisel wouldn't pass through to the camera itself.

"Cars!" Bart stage-whispered, and we lazily jogged a safe distance into the lot.

"Not gonna happen, time for plan B," I said, pulling a can of flat black spray paint from the bag and jogging back toward the camera.

"All clear," Bart said, looking up and down the street. I covered the dome with a thick coat of paint and sprayed around it as well, letting the paint drip so that any passer-by could tell from a distance that this node of the panopticon was disabled. We went and painted another dome camera across town.

"We'll keep an eye on these, to see how long it takes to clean them and learn whether the process scrapes or fogs the dome. This may become a thing we just do for time-sensitive stuff like marches or whatever, but it can't be a permanent fix."

We were jacked up on adrenaline again and not ready to settle in, so we approached a restaurant that had two cameras pointing toward the sidewalks

that were the boundaries of their so-called property. We were beginning to act together more naturally. We approached almost without discussion, I looked both ways down the street—"Clear!"—and we both jumped up, grabbed a camera, and twisted. The cameras came away in our hands and we ran off the way we'd come, into a residential neighborhood where we unmasked, stripped down to our yuppie attire, and walked off into the night.

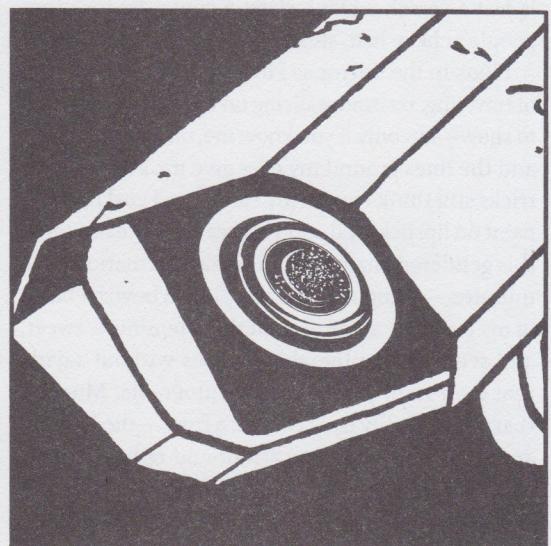
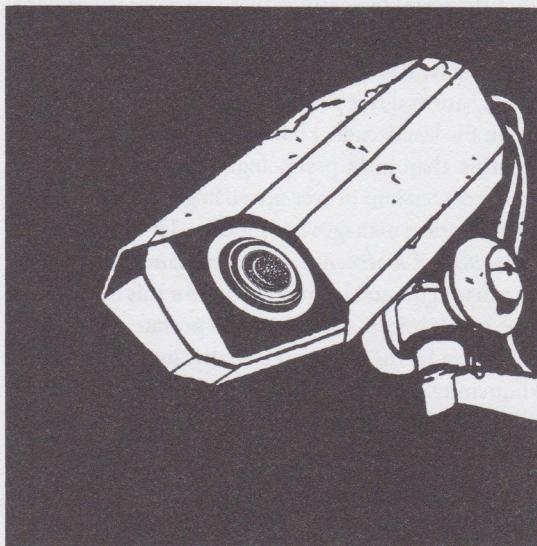
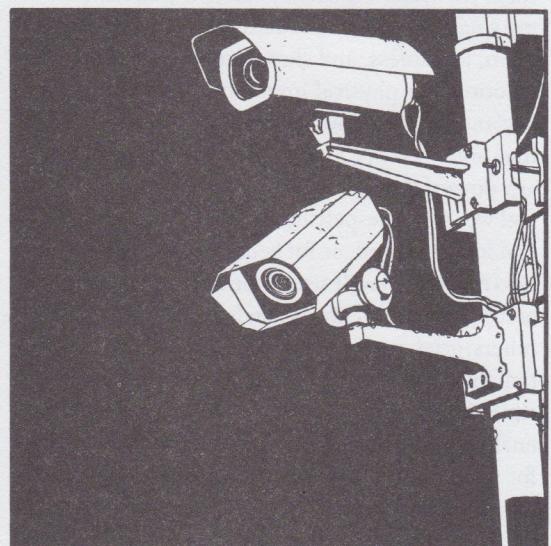
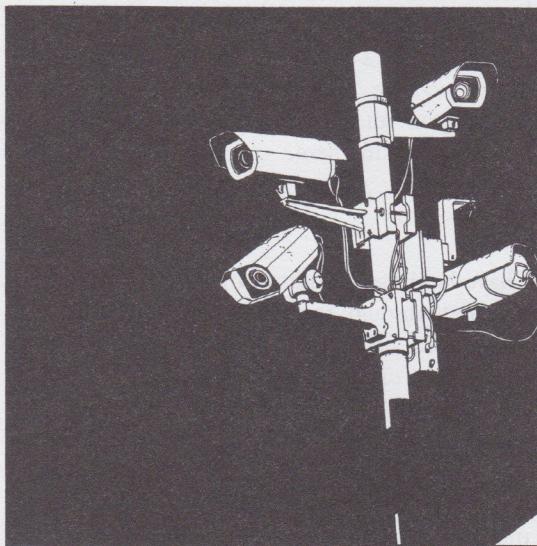
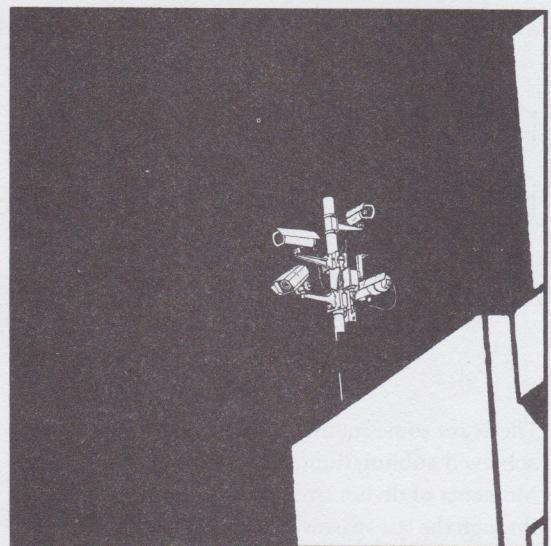
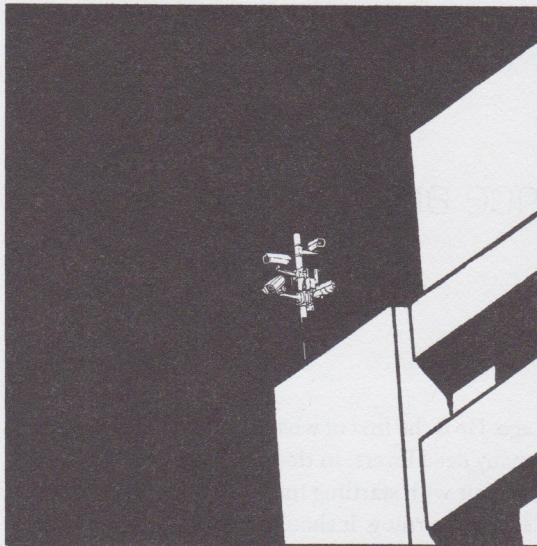
## Reconnaissance

When Bart pointed out the two cameras outside of the mall, I couldn't stop thinking about them. Every time I passed them, I looked not just to figure out how to take them down, but to see how bodies moved around the space. During what times was the area active? During what time was it dead?

One night, I had some extra time and decided I could spend a little time sitting outside the mall. I sat on a bench far away for most of the time, but I expected to have to get close to the camera at some point, to check the alleyway not visible from the bench, so I wore inconspicuous clothing and a bright yellow jacket. The bright yellow jacket was a trick I picked up from learning about the psychology of recognition—people remember only the most noticeable characteristics about you, like your bright-colored shirt or your tacky shoes, and then make the rest up. Later, I extended this trick by walking differently than normal during recon for the cameras I was going to remove myself.

I sat outside the mall and watched. For thirty minutes, no one walked even near the cameras. I changed spots and checked out the alleyway. No one. Weird. I sat a little longer on the bench and went home. In case the night I'd done recon had been an outlier, I returned the next night. It was Friday and the cameras were right by a bar, so if no one walked by this time, I could be sure it wasn't a fluke. I arrived about an hour before the bars closed. Again, not one person passed. I watched for about twenty minutes, long enough to be sure the place was going to be an easy one. So easy. Fun as hell too.

*These actions and this text are dedicated to Jeremy Hammond: [www.freejeremy.net](http://www.freejeremy.net)*



# Prorate Confidant: Beyond Despoiled Innocence and Empowerment

Angustia Celeste, [angustia@riseup.net](mailto:angustia@riseup.net)

There are some moments when I feel that I have achieved sublimation, that I have become holy. Moments of divine strength when I grit my teeth through the last spasms or painful thrust of an over-eager trick, allow unsteady hands to pull and paw at my small breasts in an attempt to overcome alienation, loneliness, and shame, move someone from emotional or physical impotence to joy, share in a deviant desire without judgment or hold someone as they orgasm or cry. I provide an opportunity for usually powerful men to be honest for a brief spell—to feel weak and despairing.

A lover thanked me for being so open to hopelessness the other day. It struck me as an apt description of my professional life. When I am able to transmute others' grief, a part of me is made sweeter. I have a practiced patience that allows people to tell me horrible things. A certain familiarity with discomfort enables me to be present in that moment, accept it for what it is, then proceed with seamless grace to emotionally cathartic sex. It is a physical sacrifice that does not actually touch me. My body, on most days, is just a vessel, a blank slate, a container for other people's cheap lust, steadied desire, or aching need.

I look in the mirror as I dress for work. The years of traveling, resistance, living on the cusp are starting to show—but only if you know me, only when I smile and the lines around my eyes give me away. All my tricks still think I am in my early 20s. I curl my hair, paint on lipstick, and apply mascara. I have mastered this gendered chameleon-like transformation in 15 minutes—changing from the playful boyish charm of my everyday attire to something feminine, sweet, and seemingly vulnerable. It goes without saying that men want you to appear vulnerable. Much of that vulnerability is, of course, a front—the lingerie and lace are actually my armor and not much gets past them.

Lately, though, more is getting past than usual. I am working every day and grieving in tandem. An old friend I was sweet on killed himself a few weeks

ago. He is the first of what time necessitates will be many dead lovers. In this grief I feel other people's despair with startling intensity. I do not think that sex is mourning. It should sometimes be about joy, pleasure, release, and renewal, although there are many different ways to define pleasure and excise pain. I am just a conduit for emotions and energy stored too long. Have you ever touched someone you just met and truly understood what they are feeling in that moment?



I have held many bodies in intimate embrace—hundreds through the years. So many I have lost track. Aging feeble bodies, exposed and vulnerable; surely many of them must be dead by now. We live in such a shallow, image-obsessed culture; people always ask me how I can manage to hold those bodies without revulsion, with such tenderness. As though self-worth were proportioned by skin elasticity, as though time and its passing imprint were a curse. It's not the wrinkled casings that make my tricks hard to caress. The hardest part is dealing with what's on the inside. It's difficult to see people for what they really are and not pass judgment.

In the last decade, I have elicited more self-examination than most psychologists and been party to more confessions in over-priced lingerie than the local parish priest manages in a lifetime. I have traced the trajectory of senescence with tactile familiarity, fingertip to tongue, and been rewarded for this talent with too much information. I am the prorate confidant.

I have learned a lot of unflattering truths about humanity, or at least a certain subsection of it. I have learned that many successful men, those with the most power, are not happy. Some are simply treading water in their own bored dissatisfaction, but many are in a great deal of pain. Our culture is awash in self-hatred and self-doubt, deep sadness, emptiness, despair—and most people can't talk about it.

The challenge of this epoch is to not die inside before your time comes physically. So many people are already dead. Sex work is a daily practice in accepting mortality. I pick up polished hard pieces of other people's regret, anger, and sorrow and I swallow them whole. I have become very good at swallowing stones.

We redress our deep discomfort with the ways we live and change it into other things: indulgence; lascivious consumption; greed; lust; neurotic, obsessive tendencies. Most of my client base is seeking validation for the destructive and depressing ways we all use the earth, the ways we use each other, and the spiritually empty aspirations that pass for modern life. In this chapel of shallow consumerism, lo and behold, the sex worker has become priestess, counselor, and keeper of a world of fear, sin, and pain that only the female figure deemed beyond redemption, social salvation, or honor could mediate.

How many of my clients acknowledge they are paying for absolution or redemption? Not many. Occasionally, on a good day, I inspire my johns to examine their sexual and spiritual life in a critical manner, but that labor is intensely personal. The structural role of sex workers is not something frequently considered by clients.

Why is there a constant demand for sex work? The pressing need for sexual fulfillment and intimacy is a direct result of patriarchy. The gender binary keeps us from relating to each other in healthy and mutually satisfying ways. This system affects people of all genders, though it uses the female body as its preferred method of enforcement.

When you are perceived to be female you are ceded to the public sphere. Your body is always open for comment and judgment. You must negotiate possession at all times. Proving that someone of the "opposite" gender already owns you is one of the only ways to avoid constant sexual solicitation. Any divergence from this model leaves you suspect and open to being preyed on or pursued. Marriage, with its social, economic, and sexual binds, controls the female subject within a system of self-participatory control.

Whores touch something deep within the core of social mores because we provide services that are traditionally confined within the chains of matrimony, heterosexuality, and male supremacy. If sex work is radical in any way, it is because it allows "men" to meet their sexual needs through brief,

\* I know that cisgender women and trans folks solicit sex workers as well, but in the interest of discussing the broader implications of sex work in modern society, I would like to acknowledge that statistically most clients are cisgender males—that is, male-socialized and male-identified.

instead of sustained, intimate relations. Intimacy by the hour creates uncomfortable fissures in the most basic structures of social domination—the straight monogamous couple and, by extension, the nuclear family.

Sex work has been around since time immemorial, and it certainly hasn't shattered these institutions yet. However changing social mores around sex, female participation in the labor force and the increasing acceptability of divorce has made it somewhat harder for marriage and infidelity (when discovered) to exist concurrently. It begs the question, if people cannot be constrained and held in check through heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, and familial obligation, then how will they be managed?

Is sex work a small window into the joyful chaos of free association, or is it simply the commercialization of that potential? Discussions of sex work infrequently explore these themes, because the debate is so monopolized by essentialists arguing over the dichotomy of empowered whore vs. victim.

Many second-wave feminists think that all whores are complicit in patriarchy—guilty by virtue of association—or that sex workers are victims who deserve help getting out of the business. That view of the world does not ring true to me. The language of victimhood is degrading. Paid erotic exchange does not negate the ability to make informed choices about one's life—regardless of one's social or economic status. Agency is not the hallowed property of politicized sex workers. Sex work happens within a context of social control, but that is a result of capitalism, and is not unique to whoring. All economic exchange is coercive, and at the end of the day whores are neither more responsible for nor more exploited by patriarchy or capitalism than anybody else.

I think it is worth asking why mutually consented acts between adults are so vilified to begin with. It must be the consent and the open communication as much as the financial compensation that creates such discomfort. Social stigma around sex work highlights the horrific ambivalence many people have toward any kind of negotiated consent in sexual exchange.

In order to work in the sex industry in a sustainable manner, you must become adept at stating, negotiating, and affirming your personal boundaries. You must create and teach a language of respectful, safe sexual practice to a cross-section of the population that was never taught how to engage in healthy intimacy. Sex always involves power exchange—the question is how to negotiate that in an ethical manner. The affirmation of "yes" that prearranged sexual exchange embodies lays bare how often normative sexual practices in our society, both within and

outside of marriage, involve coercion and domination and leave no room for “no.”

My body is my own—to use, proffer up, commercialize, mark, and display (to consenting adults) in any way that I want. I choose to be a whore and I feel no shame in it. Yet I am expected to. I should feel shame. The culture wars over which socialized gender is more to blame for this sorry state of affairs are not something I feel invested in. If the gender binary is a prison, it is one that few have managed to escape. We are all both prisoners and guards, aren’t we? Queers, gender deviants, and hoes cheer ourselves up by insisting that sex work is empowering, but I don’t know if we are “free” as much as we are fastened onto a longer chain.

I am not a soapbox courtesan or red Madame. It’s a nice idea, but I do not claim to be bringing down the pillars of Western society one marriage at a time. Frankly, I don’t think straight people need my help destroying the institution of marriage or the nuclear family. I think sex work displays certain social vulgarities and hypocrisies in an interesting light, but I don’t trick as a tactic to start some kind of sexual/social revolt or to change my johns in any intentional way. I don’t trick out of pity, desperation, or joy. At the end of the day, I trick for the alms. I do it for money and autonomy.

In exchange for compassion, human contact, and affection, I get to fund dreams most of my clients don’t know exist: dreams of social upheaval, resistance, and solidarity. Dreams which seek to unravel that which has made us so dissatisfied with our lives and made some able to live unhappily in their luxury. There is pleasure in performance. I derive a certain amount of camp satisfaction from parlaying society’s imposition of femininity into an economic surplus. High-end sex work pays well. It allows me to circumvent many social and economic structures I would rather not be invested in. Making a lot of money for essentially part-time work is wonderful. It gives you time to pursue creative projects and spend time with your kids. But calling it freedom speaks more to the grueling realities of capital and the small amount of breathing room we have than the fact that sex workers are economically unchained. The privilege of being a high-end call girl has kept me from such desperate fates as working for a nonprofit as a professional activist. Yet tricking offers only repose, not escape, from the market.

Lately, in certain circles, sex work has become quite en vogue. Hustling itself is considered to be a political act. The income I make allows me a certain autonomy in struggle, but sex work itself is not my political work. Sex work has taught me to be kind,

gentle, and forgiving at times, but narratives of empowerment coming out of feminism’s third wave ultimately ring false to me, especially the idolatry of high-class whoring. I have seen too many friends become addicted to the money and the lifestyle that escorting offers to be able to ethically reinforce the idea that it is inherently freeing.

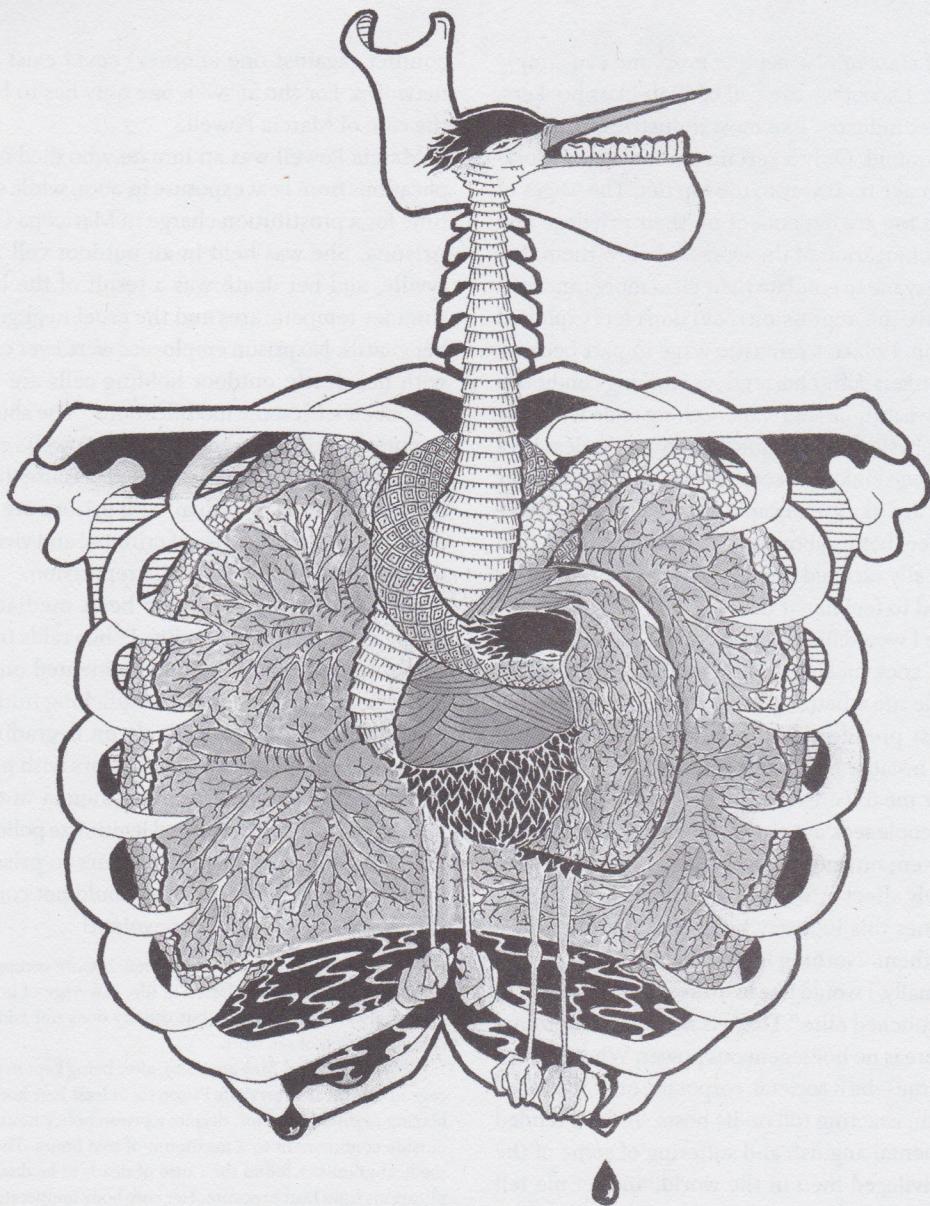
Fast money is corrupting. It is very difficult to make large amounts of money in cash and retain a grounded sense of what one “needs.” That financial slippery slope is part of why, after a decade of working, on and off, I am done with the industry. I started out feeling unconstrained due to my ability to hustle whenever necessary and ended up simply running a business. Behind the avant-garde identity of the politicized high-end worker, a much more insidious class-consciousness is rising. I think it is worth asking ourselves: are we performing for the bourgeois or are we becoming them?

Discourses that paint sex work as a form of total emancipation are a reaction to the judgments of a moralizing public. These narratives have pragmatic utility, depending on the audience. They can be a strategic way to deal with police repression, but it is worth asking where empowerment will take us—all the way to legalization?\* What great joys will we find in a more closely managed, taxed, and flooded market? I’ve worked abroad in legal brothels. The safety of a madam and security guard were nice, but I did not feel empowered giving half of my earnings to the house. Rates in the legal brothels were very low and I ended up making 10% of what I usually made in an independent black market exchange.

Pushing for decriminalization, given the psychological and social cost of imprisonment, makes sense, but legalization is an absurd goal for those invested in autonomy. Sex workers are criminals and empowerment is a useful political narrative when trying to combat narratives of knee-jerk victimization that help legitimize policing, but is empowerment emotionally honest? What if we do, at times, feel used, exhausted, and disheartened? What if sex work is exploitative—not because selling sex is wrong or dirty, but because it is a form of economic exchange?

The absurd moral judgments of second-wave feminists and conservatives aside, it makes sense that one would feel reflexive discomfort when commodifying sex. As an anarchist, I always feel some discomfort when commercializing parts of myself. Given the

\* Legalization refers to government management of sex work with all the codes, taxes, and monitoring that comes along with regulation. Decriminalization refers to making sex work no longer illegal under the current criminal code but still unregulated.



compartmentalizing required to package and sell something as feral as sexuality, burnout should be expected. Especially when so many politicized workers imply that what is essentially intimate labor should feel like a riot.

Sex work feels radical because there is a low bar when it comes to sex positivity in this society and sex workers frequently help people accept themselves. From an emotional perspective, we do hold power. It is not a power that is very widely recognized, and I think empowerment narratives should be appreciated for trying to bring that emotional labor to light. The potent healing encompassed by the idea of the “whore as goddess” is real, and should be respected, but in what bereft world are our highest aspirations to offer careful tending only to the broken souls of the upper-middle-class and the rich?

I work in the high end of the industry. Independent call girls generally enjoy more autonomy in working conditions and take home a net percentage of gross income that is incomparable to the realities suffered by non-independent workers. Narratives of empowerment don't really address problems of social control and industry managers. Neither do they address the repression that street-based workers face daily at the hands of the police or the increasing criminalization indoor and outdoor workers experience via anti-trafficking raids. Very few people offer genuine solutions to these aspects of the industry because there really aren't that many, short of a larger-scale collapse of the economic and social order. Second-wave feminists use categories of victimization which ironically lead to more policing, and third-wave feminists either don't address

issues of class or else act like everyone can simply trade-up. Except we can't all be high-class hookers.

The sex industry, like most industries, is shaped like a pyramid. Only a certain percentage of workers can make their way to the top tier. The wages of those on top are dependent on their privilege and on the subjugation of the workers below them. My clients pay me to emulate their class mores and airs, and to give the impression that I don't feel exploited by my job. I make a fantastic wage in part because other workers suffer horrendous working conditions and my wealthy clients want nothing to do with that kind of physical or emotional coercion (unless it's a part of some kinky, consensual script). High-end sex workers are like green capitalists: we exist to make people feel better about a consumer exchange that hasn't really escaped the terms of the market but is supposed to feel like it has.

While I would like to knock down the pedestal of "radical" cock sucking, I must say that being a whore has made me a better person. It has tempered my extremist predilections to judge, categorize, and dismiss, because it has opened a world of moral relativity for me to consider and play with. Capitalism makes people seek out absolution. Everyone wants to be forgiven; no one wants to admit how much they negatively affect others by living unexamined lives. Sometimes this industry hurts people, sometimes it heals them. Nothing is simple.

Personally, I would like to do away with the idea of the "untouched elite." There is no unity in domination; there is no homogeneous power. Where power does accrue—be it societal, corporate, or economic—it takes an exacting toll on its hosts. Today I tended to the mental anguish and suffering of some of the most privileged men in the world, and let me tell you, their strength is an illusion and in some ways so is their power. I think sometimes anarchists act as though the "enemy" is an easily delineated category, but it isn't. Because control regimes are participatory, every thoughtful person will draw their line in the sand in a slightly different place.

So is sex work radical? If sex work can be said to be a part of resistance, it is because it is a part of our survival and, though it may be depressing to admit, resistance these days looks a lot like survival. Beyond survival, I don't think we've yet answered the question of the place that sex work will have in struggle. I know for myself, as time passes, hustling feels more and more like class warfare. Whether that is an astute political observation or just a sign that I am definitely on my way out is hard to say. Yet it is still worth asking where points of productive conflict (against the State) as opposed to unproductive

conflict (against one another) could exist in our networks. For the answer, one only has to look up the case of Marcia Powell.

Marcia Powell was an inmate who died of complications from heat exposure in 2009 while serving time for a prostitution charge in Maricopa County, Arizona. She was held in an outdoor cell in Perryville, and her death was a result of the intense summer temperatures and the cruel negligence of her guards. No prison employees were ever charged with her death; outdoor holding cells are still in use, albeit with some modifications.\* The abuse and impunity to kill apparent in Marcia Powell's case are not anomalies. Marcia Powell died because the State considered her a "criminal" and prisons are places of torture. The categories of criminal and victim are tools of control used to justify repression.

Social control has always been mediated via women's bodies and sexuality. Police raids in many communities, including undocumented ones, are being financed through anti-trafficking initiatives. Anti-trafficking narratives rely on degrading and misinformed sexual hysteria. Posters with pictures of abused children use implied trauma in the sex industry to fund, conceal, and legitimize police raids that send consenting adult workers to prison and immigration detention.<sup>†</sup> This should not come as a shock—the State is not benevolent!

\* Marcia Powell has been extended much more compassion in death than she was ever offered in life. Coverage of her case is almost always sympathetic, but usually does not address the criminalization of sex work.

† Powell, 48, died May 20, 2009, after being kept in a human cage in Goodyear's Perryville Prison for at least four hours in the blazing Arizona sun. This, despite a prison policy limiting such outside confinement to a maximum of two hours. The county medical examiner found the cause of death to be due to complications from heat exposure. Her core body temperature upon examination was 108 degrees Fahrenheit. She suffered burns and blisters all over her body... Powell, who was serving a 27-month sentence for prostitution, actually expired after being transported to West Valley Hospital, where acting ADC Director Charles Ryan made the decision to have her life support suspended."

-Stephen Lemons, "Marcia Powell's Death Unavenged: County Attorney Passes on Prosecuting Prison Staff," Phoenix New Times Blog (September 1, 2010)

† Police raids financed through anti-trafficking initiatives claim to "save" workers from the industry by offering them social services and diversion—only that's not what really happens. If you break down the numbers after raids, you discover that many workers (due to past convictions, drug possession, or legal status) don't qualify for the offensive, mostly Christian-based diversion programs and end up with criminal charges anyway.

For more information see coverage of Project Rose (Phoenix) <http://itsandsass.com/reporting-on-rose-a-journalists-work-in-phoenix-and-project-raise-tucson> (Tucson) <http://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/sex-sting/Content?oid=3668055>.

Sex workers' rights organizers like Monica Jones are fighting profiling and criminalization: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darby-hickey/monica-jones\\_b\\_4937899.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darby-hickey/monica-jones_b_4937899.html).

“Sex work” encompasses so many experiences that it is almost too general to be a useful political category. Each facet, and within that each worker, will surely have a different take, but hopefully we can agree that we don’t need “community” police officers or social workers to speak for us. When we let state agents speak for us, we allow ourselves to be recuperated and used for evil.

Social control is something we all engage in, at different times in different ways, therefore no one static identity is inherently radical or freeing. Second-wave feminists infantilize sex workers as victims, third-wave feminists don’t address the problem of the market, and many anarchists would rather focus on the sins of white-collar professionals than see society as a system of social management. We must be careful not to reinforce simplistic narratives that keep us from reaching our potential for social rupture. I don’t think we really need to worry about whether sex work is *inherently* radical or not. These terms of debate are too essentialist. Sex work, as a criminalized profession, is relevant to social struggle when we make it relevant. We make hustling relevant when we connect sex work to movements against incarceration not from a place of privileged charity, but because criminalization is deeply personal.

Fighting mass incarceration should matter to all sex workers because all sex workers risk going to prison. High-end workers may not feel they are vulnerable by virtue of their impressive earnings since money can buy you a certain amount of “justice,” but not always. The increase in repression aimed at indoor workers over the last few years should be setting off alarm bells. Once the vice squad has gotten its kicks, what is to stop them from actually doing their job? Security and protection for sex is for trophy wives, not whores. No worker is too high-end to prosecute—the case of the DC Madame taught us that.<sup>‡</sup> In this economy, prisoners are also a profitable commodity. The hierarchy of sex work can stop being advantageous whenever it is convenient for local politicians and police. It is difficult to examine our vulnerabilities, but dangerous and foolhardy not to.

We must abandon the false sense of security implied by the industry’s internal hierarchies and look more critically at the State infrastructures that seek to control us, because it is there that we will find our common thread. Before we can defend ourselves, we must see ourselves clearly and understand our own motives. What draws us so strongly to these risks and to these rewards? What are we willing to give up to

<sup>‡</sup> For a brief overview of the DC Madam case, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deborah\\_Jeane\\_Palfrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deborah_Jeane_Palfrey).

continue to exercise our limited autonomy? Narratives of empowerment, or even those of class war, cannot fully sum up what draws people into this kind of labor.

Sex work was a calling I found of my own accord through a mixture of intrigue in my power to move people, a bit of emotional voyeurism, and a healthy disgust with late-stage capitalism. I tell anyone I am bringing into the fold—appreciate the hustle for what it is, be present in the moment, honor what it can teach you, and always pay tribute to the whores who paved the way. Bring a little more joy into the world (to those who deserve it), hold power over your johns with compassion, and always get your money upfront. Most importantly, live without shame and make no apologies for working a rotten system to your advantage. Just don’t forget that climbing farther up the refuse pile of capital is not the point. Dream big!

As for the question of the “social value” of my labor, I pessimistically await my anointment knowing most people will never acknowledge the worth of what I do. Yet I am grounded, because I no longer need that affirmation. We are not just what we do for money, we are so much more than that. Sex work doesn’t need to empower me; I am empowered by my family and friends in struggle. I believe in us, because until there are no more prisons to hold whores and mothers, rent bois and queens, we will fight.<sup>§</sup> Struggle is a process, not an event. There is no failure or success in social war, only persistence. This perseverance is the essential spiritual labor of our historical moment. In the end hustling is just an imperfect coping mechanism. To engender resistance, we must keep our rage sacred and focus that anger against society. We probably won’t “win,” at least not in this generation, but that’s all right. If we rise each morning and do our best to fight against this prison society, we will discover, in many ways, we are *already free*.

<sup>§</sup> For an interesting, if academic, look at trans folks and incarceration, see Stanley, E. A., & Smith, N. (2011). *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison-Industrial Complex*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

# **Grin and Bare It All: Against Liberal Conceptions of Sex Work**

Luna Celeste, [ferretpenguin@riseup.net](mailto:ferretpenguin@riseup.net)

Sex work is a constant yet discreet presence in anarchist circles—commonly taken on by the young precarious part-time laborers that make up the bulk of our scenes, privately considered by many more of our cash-strapped comrades. Our theoretical analyses of sex work tend to mirror our personal and collective feelings about gendered oppression, class society, the violence that capitalist patriarchy inflicts on our bodies and hearts—and the efficacy of various forms of resistance. This essay conceptualizes sex work as a point where feminized labor (“women’s work,” caring labor) reproduces itself—that is, where a primarily-female workforce of social workers, scholars, writers, lecturers, professional sex work abolitionists, non-profits, “rescue” organizations, and bloggers exists to “serve” and “care for,” but ultimately control, another primarily female workforce: sex workers. The former workforce does this in ways that often undermine sex workers’ autonomy and livelihoods, at the behest of ruling-class men, in ways that benefit men sexually and perpetuate patriarchal and statist violence.

Sex workers serve these same ruling class men, directly or indirectly, through the performance of paid reproductive labor\* that helps stabilize the superstructure of heterosexual monogamy, as a concurrent dynamic that depends on the oppression of sex laborers as a class. As a result, sex laborers are pulled into the cycle of stigma and criminalization that helps to maintain a perpetually marginalized, easily exploitable underclass.

## **We Are Not Your Social Service**

Strip clubs are normalized as a rite of passage for 18-year-old men, as an acceptable diversion for financially accomplished men who have earned it

and want to relax (or working-class men who work hard and wish to treat themselves), as a judgment-free space without the pressure to conform to the “civilizing” social norms imposed by the women in their workplaces and romantic lives. A slightly more negative view of sex work consumption holds that seeing a sex worker is a pitiable last resort for men who are less physically desirable or socially savvy, but still entitled to sexualized services. This centering of the consumer experience to weave a narrative that is palatable to men conceals the power differential that is triangulated between bosses, exotic dancers, and customers, such that dancers are inherently the least powerful in the equation. Abolitionist feminists (feminists who oppose and seek to abolish sex work) point to this empathy for customers as a hallmark of sex workers’ rights discourse. While the centering of customers’ needs and desires is a deplorable trend among some liberal, anti-worker, sex-positive feminists, its frequency is highly overstated and functions as a straw man argument to discredit sex workers’ rights activists as being more concerned with male orgasms than workers’ liberation.

In addition to paying the strip club a base mandatory payment every night plus a cut of our sales, strippers cover additional costs of operation such as wardrobe, staff wages (bouncers, DJ), and the maintenance of our own physical and mental health. We work not only to generate personal profit, but also to front these industry-standard expenses imposed on us by the bosses. We perform a constant precarious balancing act: we cater to the customer’s desires as attentively as possible within the limits of the law and club rules, and the responsibility for keeping the customer from becoming unruly often falls on us—yet when customers break the rules or violate our boundaries, we are victim-blamed. Given this dynamic of precarious anxiety, objectification, economic exploitation, and disempowerment, it’s unfair to expect sex workers to be sympathetic to customers’ sexualities and entitlement when they play out in ways that can be uniquely invasive and uncomfortable to us. The recognition of sex work

\* The undervalued, unpaid or underpaid invisible labor that is typically performed by women as a means to “reproduce” the workforce, i.e., cooking, cleaning, comfort, socialization, education, sex, childbearing and rearing. Further reading on reproductive labor: *Caliban and The Witch* or *The Arcane of Reproduction*.



as “real work” shouldn’t depend on the perceived social value of the job, despite well-meaning (but ultimately ableist and ageist) arguments from some outspoken sex work activists that sex workers play a positive role in society as sexual outlets for the elderly, disabled, or kinky. Just as we shouldn’t water down our feminism to make it sexy and comfortable to men, we should resist the urge to humanize ourselves through our social and sexual usefulness to male consumers.

Meanwhile, we are excluded from the fulfillment of our own desires by the usual forces: slut-shaming, compulsory heterosexuality, the social construction of certain bodies as less desirable, and histories of violence and trauma, which create barriers to sexual enjoyment. These roots of sexual exclusion are so systemic and internalized as to be socially invisible, exacerbated by customers’ own perceived feelings of exclusion from unhindered access to “desirable” bodies—that is, to the young, thin, light-skinned bodies considered desirable by the standards of white supremacist patriarchy. Essentially, customers like to think that we have unfettered access to gratifying sex and are thus its gatekeepers. This is a dangerous and misogynistic mythology.

### ***Benevolent Coercion and Unenthusiastic Consent***

A parallel top-down dynamic coexists with our servicing of the male workforce: the enforcement of caring upon sex workers (particularly those who perform illicit, undocumented, full-service, or street-based work). The logic of “saving” women<sup>†</sup> from performing this kind of labor is a direct legacy of middle-class social-working women of Victorian England and their contemporaries in the US. Rarely discussed is the classist, coercive, and hypocritical history of women’s entry into the caring professions—particularly with regards to the construction of the prostitute as a subject in need of saving by benevolent ladies during the “rise of the social” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this era, “those doing charitable works entered into a governmental relationship with the objects of their charity, and created themselves as important social actors in the process... ‘Helping’ became a profession that relied on identifying subjects and then placing them in closed spaces where they could be worked upon and controlled.”<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Savior rhetoric tends to ignore people who aren’t women.

<sup>‡</sup> “Helping Women Who Sell Sex: The Construction of Benevolent Identities,” Laura Augustin

Modern non-sex-working feminists who support abolitionist/savior tactics or engage in these projects themselves presume a more dignified identity than that of the sex worker. They often end up replicating a system of enforced docility based on misogynistic, bourgeois notions of respectability and the proper place of women in the public sphere. Middle-class academics and writers who make their living promoting a framework that casts sex workers as an inherently victimized identity “for their own good” do so at the direct expense of the agency and economic livelihood of women of lower socioeconomic status. Statist feminists’ rhetoric of “fighting the sex industry” typically relies on State power in the form of legislative reform that criminalizes at least some aspects of sex work, increases the power of law enforcement, and regulates the sex industries. This regulation can have the unintended effect of further marginalizing the least privileged workers by making their safe participation in these economies prohibitively expensive or difficult.

Thus, sex workers are bound in a system of caring labor: on one hand, that which is enacted upon us, sometimes forcibly, by carceral feminists, paternalistic liberals, the prison-industrial complex, the surveillance State,\* and the superstructure of capitalist patriarchy; on the other, that which we perform for middle- to upper-class men, not to mention the unpaid reproductive labor we are often mandated to perform in our homes and communities. In some ways, this system self-replicates:

“From homemaking to professional housekeeping—not to mention nursing, hospitality, and phone sex—women and people of color are disproportionately responsible for the care that keeps this society functioning, yet have disproportionately little say in what that care fosters. Likewise, a tremendous amount of care goes into oiling the machinery that maintains hierarchy: families help police relax after work, sex workers help businessmen let off steam, secretaries take on the invisible labor that preserves executives’ marriages.” (*Self As Other: Reflections on Self-Care*, CrimethInc. 2013).

\* The FBI was founded in 1908 specifically to investigate and combat supposed “white slavery” in American brothels, leading to the White-Slave Traffic Act (Mann Act) of 1910. International policing, in fact, developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to both the “anarchist terrorism” of the 1890s and the threat of international “white slavery.” (Deflem, 2005. “International Police Cooperation—History of” pp. 795–798 in *The Encyclopedia of Criminology*, edited by Richard A. Wright and J. Mitchell Miller. New York: Routledge.)

At the same time, institutions that collude with the State (such as academia and the nonprofit complex) are often positioned against the selling of sexualized services, supporting direct or indirect criminalization.<sup>†</sup> These institutions passively align with the State by controlling the discourse around sex work, feminism, and labor via a professional class of experts, most of whom have never engaged in sex work themselves but assume that they are entitled to speak on these intersections based on their position as members of “the sex class.”<sup>‡</sup>

While sex workers who critique non-sex-workers’ skewed analysis of the industry are criticized for being privileged, scholars, authors, non-profit representatives, policymakers, abolitionist activists, professional feminists, and other “experts” on sex work are not held to the same standard of scrutiny. Regardless of our experiences, sex workers who don’t fit into our culture’s perception of what the “worst off” looks like are assumed to be “not representative of the average sex worker.” The idea that workers currently in the sex industry are too close to it and too invested in it to have good analysis also reinforces the notion that non-sex-working feminists are qualified to speak on behalf of the “most marginalized” in the sex industry. This is similar to how the ruling class works to divide the “fringe” elements of resistance from the real “People,” not acknowledging the possibility that those of us embedded most deeply in capitalist misery are the ones pushing back against the ideological policies that most severely affect us. Portraying radical sex workers as white middle-class women, as a highly-paid minority, erases the work of people of color, poor people, undocumented immigrants, and queer and trans people who not only agitate for better working conditions in the industry, but are also on the cutting-edge of gendered labor theory. It also erases the decriminalization and harm-reduction campaigns spearheaded by sex-worker-led activist groups in the US and across the globe.<sup>§</sup>

<sup>†</sup> The “Swedish Model” criminalizes buying sex but not selling it, as well as criminalizing whatever “third party” the law determines to be “profiting” off someone else’s work. In some instances, charges of “brothel-keeping” and “pimping” have been pressed against the friends and lovers of sex workers. Many sex workers consider this a form of “backdoor” criminalization, a way of making sex work more burdensome and dangerous due to increased difficulty screening clients or being open about their work.

<sup>‡</sup> “The sex class” is a second-wave feminist term that doesn’t refer specifically to sex workers, but to [usually cisgender] women as a whole.

<sup>§</sup> Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers, SWEAT [Sex Work Education and Advocacy Taskforce] in South Africa, Scarlet Alliance in Australia, SWOP-USA, and AINSW [All-India Network of Sex Workers] are some examples; see [swaay.org](http://swaay.org)’s list of groups.



That's not to say that these experts are always blinded by their economic and social privilege, or that none have adopted their views as a result of their experiences working in the sex industry themselves. Identity itself isn't always the deciding standard for sound analysis. The problem is that (usually relatively privileged) non-sex-working feminists or former sex workers overwhelmingly take up space at the table where sex workers, especially marginalized and institutionally disenfranchised sex workers (such as street workers, drug users, trans women, single parents, and people of color) could be debating effective strategies for liberation, resistance, and survival. We should be finding ways to help each other avoid exploitation without contributing to a culture of stigma or perpetuating rhetoric that makes the criminalization of sex work a winning strategy for politicians and good PR for celebrities and CEOs.

Professional feminist academics like Gail Dines make their living appropriating our experiences, anger, and struggles as ideological talking points, with the implication that Dines is a mouthpiece for all women as a monolithic class with shared interests—a “voice for the voiceless.” According to Dines’ logic, the process of our objectification bleeds out into the rest of this feminized class and

taints mainstream culture with a kind of sick, unnatural “pornification.” If Dines believes inner-city street-based workers, or Eastern European cam girls, or Asian brothel workers, or strippers with drug addictions are truly voiceless, it’s only because she hasn’t been listening.

It’s tempting to focus our ire primarily on the experts (radical feminist or otherwise) who actively advocate against the interests of sex workers. But it’s important to recognize that the chief reason these experts are dangerous is because they act as a mediated apparatus of State power upon socially stigmatized and criminalized classes of workers. Poor street-based workers are shuffled into the prison system by way of “prostitution diversion programs” funded and spearheaded by non-profits and universities.<sup>4</sup> Sex workers’ bases of operations have been raided under Britain’s Policing and Crime Act<sup>\*\*</sup> on the pretense that the women working together were

<sup>¶</sup> Project ROSE (Reaching Out to the Sexually Exploited) is a collaboration between the Phoenix Police Department, Arizona State University’s School of Social Work, and a number of local service organizations, which rounds up “prostitutes” en masse in 2-3 day stings and forces them to enter into the 6-month diversion program or face criminal charges. See [titandsass.com/for-their-own-good-swoop-phoenix-campaign-against-diversion-initiatives/](http://titandsass.com/for-their-own-good-swoop-phoenix-campaign-against-diversion-initiatives/).

<sup>\*\*</sup> The UK feminist organization Object lobbied in favor of the Policing and Crime Act as part of their “Demand Change!” campaign, in conjunction with scores of other women’s groups.

“trafficked” and that these spaces were “brothels”; the Act effectively criminalizes those who are attempting to stay safe by selling their services indoors with other sex workers, forcing them to operate in isolation and out on the streets. Undocumented and immigrant sex workers in particular are framed as “trafficking victims,” a convenient justification for increased State surveillance and control: racial profiling, raids, invasive searches, forced placement into factories and “rehabilitation centers,” deportation, and State acquisition of sex workers’ children. This, in turn, drives workers further underground in response to increasing difficulty crossing borders, obtaining licenses, and finding and screening clients. Similarly, moral panics about the sexual exploitation of minors are induced by means of misleading and sometimes fabricated statistics, using the existence of child sex trafficking to justify the consequences of criminalizing full-service sex work.

Incarceration is a toxic cycle that reinforces itself in the lives of sex workers—a prostitution arrest in the US can result in an appearance on the local police department’s vice crime website or the cover of the weekly mugshot tabloid, and often prevents the arrestee from obtaining other employment. It can also disqualify you from other sexualized jobs—cities that require strippers to be licensed demand a criminal background check as a precondition of employment, a condition which specifically targets those charged with prostitution as undesirables, “liabilities” to the strip club. Up until as recently as 2011, escorts in New Orleans were arrested and prosecuted under the local Crimes Against Nature statute, which occasioned higher penalties and fines than a conventional prostitution charge—and required workers to register as sex offenders for a period of fifteen years to life.\* A prostitution arrest is effectively a scarlet letter, inextricably binding the offender to a life of indefinite systemic violence and exclusion.

The specter of incarceration looms over other kinds of sex workers—professional doms/dommes/switches and other fetish workers, strippers, and legal brothel workers—as a self-policing mechanism. This becomes internalized, maintaining a “whorearchy” of workers. For instance, strippers who perform illegal sex acts inside the club (or who are known for doing so outside its walls) are referred to as being “dirty,” branded “whores,” and are subject to alienation, harassment, and even violence from their “clean” coworkers. And strippers who are assaulted or otherwise violated on the job by customers

\* “Almost 40 percent of registered sex offenders in New Orleans are on the registry because of a [Crimes Against Nature] conviction.” ([www-no.org](http://www-no.org))

(especially dancers who are taken advantage of while drunk) can be apprehensive about reporting this abuse due to internalized whorephobia and fear of being victim-blamed.

This hierarchy of sexual laborers cuts full-service, undocumented, and criminalized workers off from solidarity with more “respectable” sex workers. Drug use, HIV status, and rates charged are some other factors that contribute to such divisions. Statist oppression of sex workers, combined with sex workers’ social marginalization and isolation from other workers (and one another), renders us particularly vulnerable to the most extreme forms of economic exploitation by bosses, customers, and the Market—all invariably male-dominated, all working to maintain capitalist patriarchy from different angles.

A further point of tension in feminist, liberal, and radical discourse around sex work is the issue of consent. The presence or lack of meaningful consent in our context has served as a rhetorical device to justify a variety of ideological positions on sex work, including supporting oppressive policies against sex workers and reaffirming stigmas against us. I recently read an article examining what “consent” means in the context of sex work. It critiqued “enthusiastic consent” as a model that doesn’t accommodate the reality that many people have sex for other reasons beyond compelling erotic desire—for procreation, to please a partner, for an ego boost, for a sense of closeness, for practice, for money—and that none of these invalidate the fact that consent was given: “freely consenting to unwanted sex.” It left me wondering what sexual consent means in the context of an institution that is inherently exploitative and coercive, like all labor under capitalism and patriarchy?

Our praxis should reflect and be applicable to our individual conditions and desires (or lack thereof) as sex workers.<sup>†</sup> Perhaps consent can have very different parameters in different contexts—it feels futile to apply in my workplace the same standards I use in my romantic life to determine whether good consent was practiced. Anarchists’ expectations of “good consent” are rarely achieved in the strip club. When the theorizing of consent is restricted to the interpersonal and sexual, however, we fall short of

<sup>†</sup> Discussing a “community” or “class” of people while erasing the individuals who form it is the same kind of logic that has traditionally viewed women as one nebulous mass under the pretense of common interests or shared experiences of “womanhood.” This universalization of experience was what prompted women of color, trans women, poor women, and queer women to argue for an intersectional feminist analysis that contradicted the universalizing of one set of women’s experiences (usually white, cisgender, middle-class, and Western) in the first place.

critiquing the social landscape in which ideas of consent are formed and practiced. Critiquing the larger context of consent is a positive contribution that both anarcha-feminists and radical feminists have made to the discourse: it's not enough that customers ask us what makes us "feel good," because the answer will always be motivated by the economic coercion inherent in the transaction. We have to challenge the institution and the power relations it imposes.

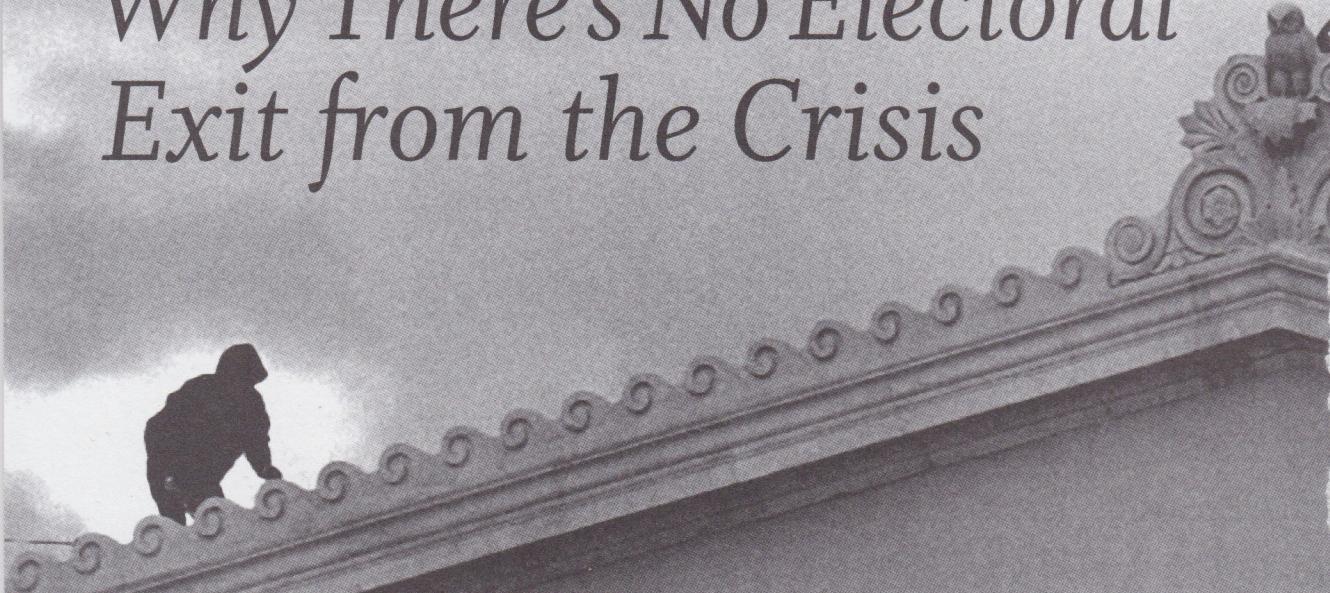
It's the paradox of the self-employed radical sex worker to simultaneously resent and anticipate male sexual entitlement, to privately condemn the objectification of women and yet to perform at work in ways that are meant to encourage that same objectification. My desire isn't for a world full of hip alternative strip clubs, run by "sex-positive" or "radical" bosses, populated by Chomsky-quoting customers whose desire for "authenticity" necessitates an increasingly emotionally invasive performance of enthusiastic consent. I want to end all the patriarchal capitalist institutions that mediate

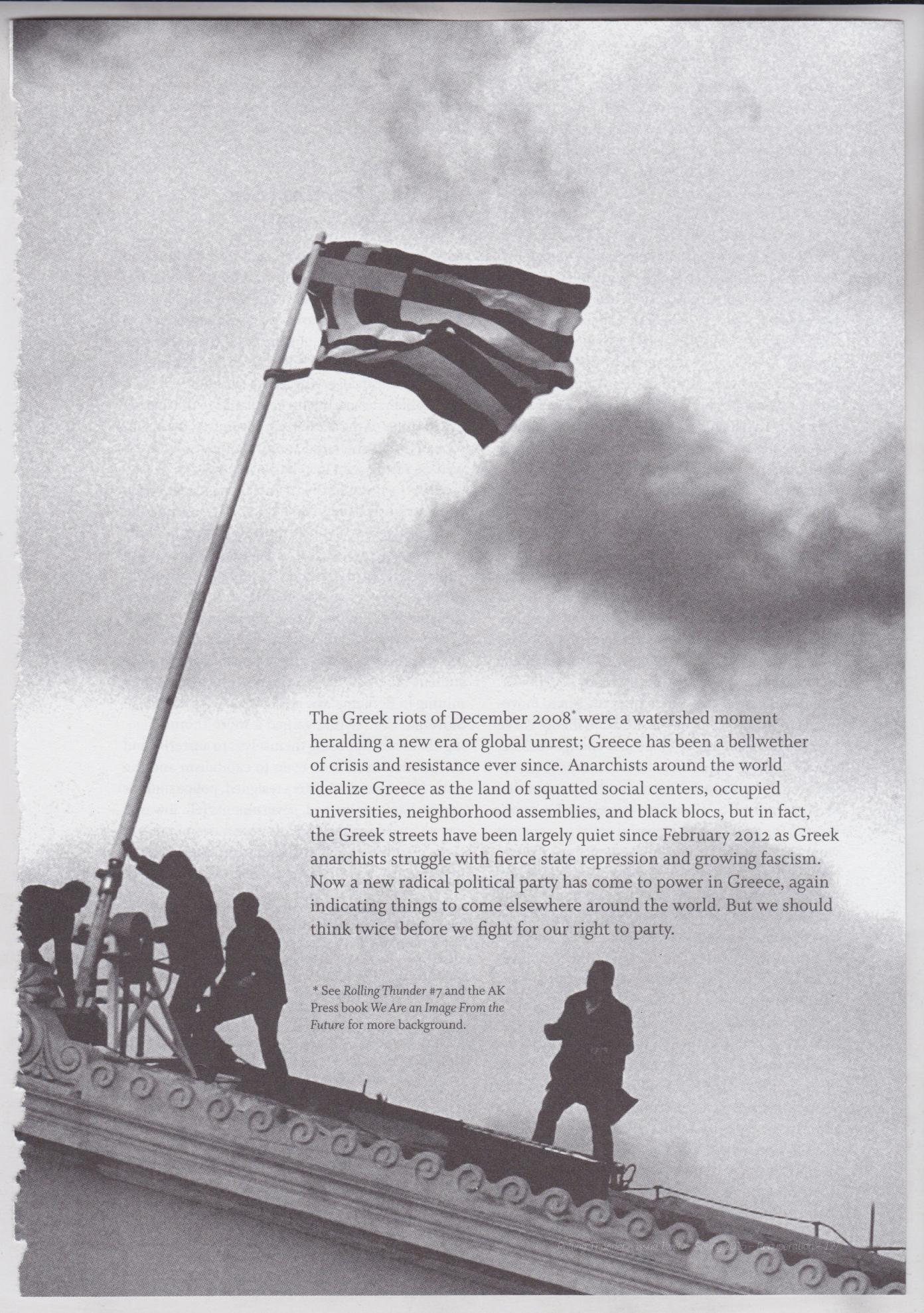
our alienation from our own bodies and our loved ones; I don't imagine that they can be reformed to foster mutually healing interactions. We should avoid the pitfall of reformist thinking that falls short of challenging these institutions themselves, and the pitfall of ignoring those most affected by these institutions in favor of an ideology that presumes a false class cohesion. We need an analysis of sex work and of labor in general that synthesizes various anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist feminisms. We must acknowledge that "caring" can often play out in oppressive, destructive ways within inherently flawed institutions and systems, particularly as it affects marginalized precarious laborers. "Helping" as a means to exert social power over us "for our own good" or for the good of women as a class serves and strengthens the carceral surveillance state and justifies its continued existence. We must look beyond sex-positive leftist rhetoric around consent, consumption, and sex workers' "rights," for a more totalizing critique of capitalism and the sex industry.



# Syriza Can't Save Greece

*Why There's No Electoral  
Exit from the Crisis*





The Greek riots of December 2008\* were a watershed moment heralding a new era of global unrest; Greece has been a bellwether of crisis and resistance ever since. Anarchists around the world idealize Greece as the land of squatted social centers, occupied universities, neighborhood assemblies, and black blocs, but in fact, the Greek streets have been largely quiet since February 2012 as Greek anarchists struggle with fierce state repression and growing fascism. Now a new radical political party has come to power in Greece, again indicating things to come elsewhere around the world. But we should think twice before we fight for our right to party.

\* See *Rolling Thunder* #7 and the AK Press book *We Are an Image From the Future* for more background.

In the first days of 2015, after years of economic crisis and austerity measures, Greek voters chose the political party Syriza to take the reins of the state. Formed from a coalition of socialist, communist, and Green groups, Syriza appeared to be sympathetic to autonomous social movements; its leaders promised to take steps against austerity and police violence.

Many outside Greece first heard of Syriza in December 2008, when, as a far-left group commanding less than 5% of the electorate, it was the only party that did not condemn the riots caused by the police murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos. Over the following years, Syriza became the most powerful party in Greece, drawing many of the voters who had supported less radical parties—and some who previously supported no parties at all. Even some Greek anarchists hoped that after years of pitched violence and repression, Syriza's victory would provide a much-needed breather.

Elsewhere around Europe, especially in peripheral states suffering similar economic turmoil, many saw Syriza as an advocate against the powerful forces of international finance. Some who had previously been active solely in autonomous social movements shifted their focus to electoral politics. When Syriza immediately began backpedaling on the promises that got them elected, supporters interpreted this as a temporary setback that could be solved by the ascension of more parties like Syriza to state power.

But will parties like Syriza offer oxygen to movements for social change—or suffocate them? We've heard such promises of "hope and change" before, when Lula and other Left politicians came to power in Latin America and Obama won the presidential election in the US. When Lula was elected in 2002, some of the world's most powerful social movements were based in Brazil; the consequences of his victory were such a setback to grassroots organizing that it took until 2013 for Brazilians to mount a real challenge to the neoliberal projects that he took up from his predecessors. The euphoria of electoral victories swiftly fades, but it can take social movements decades to recover and reorient themselves on the new political terrain.

As social democracy continues to erode in Europe, provoking disillusionment and outrage, politicians of all stripes are seeking new ways to preserve an increasingly volatile status quo. Syriza-style parties seem to be the logical structural answer: not to solve the crisis of capitalism, but rather to prolong it. We need to understand why these parties are gaining support all around Europe, what their structural role is in maintaining capitalism and the state, and how their rise and inevitable fall will shift the context of

resistance. Anarchists especially must prepare for the challenges that lie ahead, lest we find ourselves alone and backed into a corner.

## Political Parties in an Age of Uprisings

Poverty, unemployment, prohibitive tuition and healthcare costs, homelessness, hunger, forced migration, racism, criminalization, alienation, humiliation, suicide... These are not just the consequences of the financial crisis, but the conditions that precarious billions have experienced for decades as business as usual, serving as the laboratory mice in the neoliberal experiment. Yet thanks to the uneven distribution of the Fordist compromise,\* many Europeans were sheltered from this reality until the welfare state began to collapse in 2008.

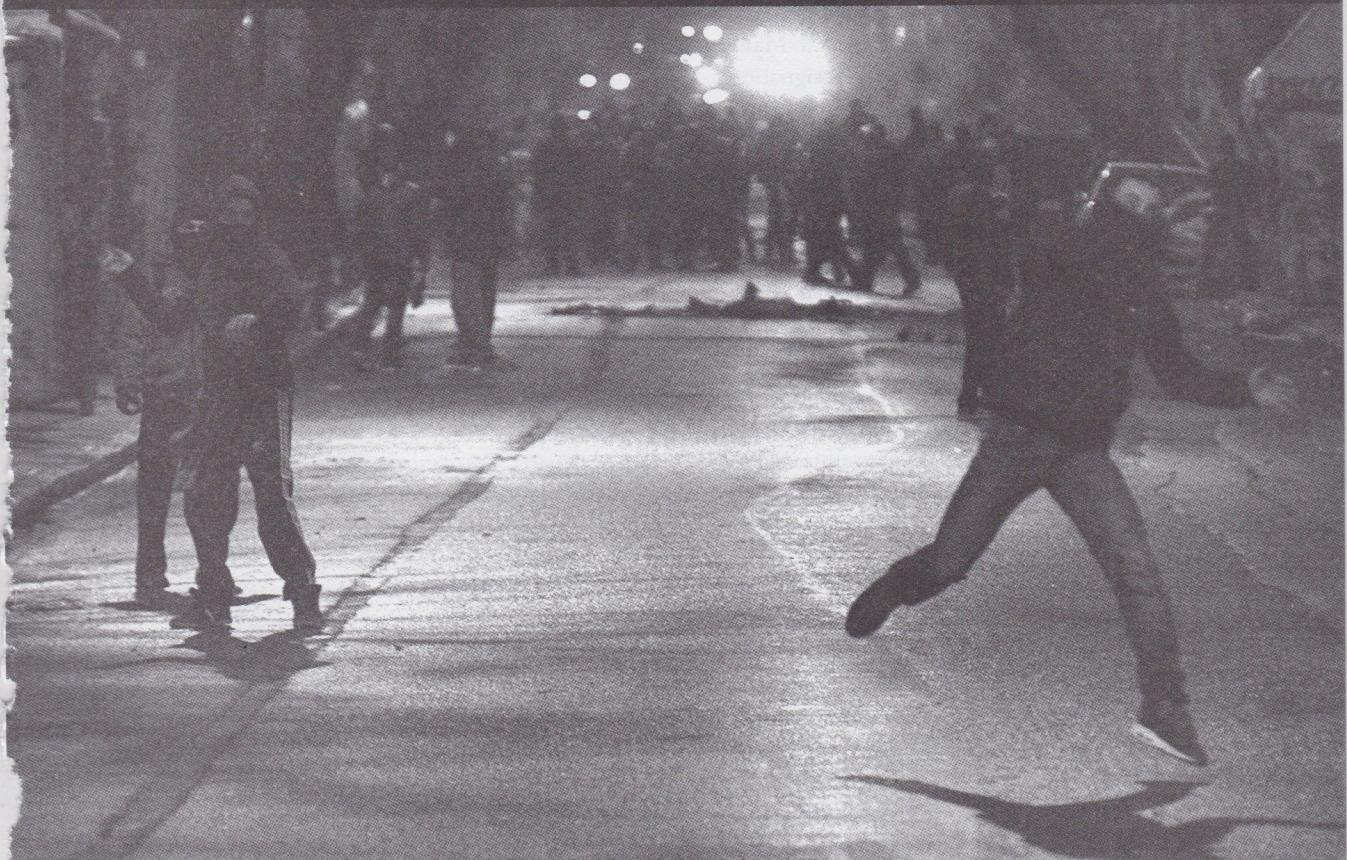
With the onset of the financial crisis, many who had previously lived relatively comfortable middle-class lives were pushed into poverty overnight. Years of upheaval followed all around Europe—not only in Greece, but also in Iceland, Spain, England, Turkey. Almost every European country has experienced some kind of popular social rebellion since 2008, all the way up to stable, social-democratic Sweden. Most of these began as single-issue struggles—the student rebellion in Croatia, protests against gold mining in Romania, the anti-corruption protests in Slovenia—but swiftly gained a more thoroughgoing character, opposing themselves to austerity and the political system or even to capitalism and the state. Mayors and ministers resigned, police stations and parliaments burned, governments fell. It wasn't just anarchists at the core of these movements—in some countries, such as Ukraine and Bulgaria, the movements veered in a nationalistic direction. But

\* By introducing assembly-line mass production and higher wages into the automobile industry, Henry Ford helped create the model that produced the North American and European middle classes: a body of workers who could afford to buy mass-produced goods with the wages they earned manufacturing them. In this context, labor organizations ceased to pursue revolutionary social change, coming to play an essential role in the market: by forcing employers to keep wages high enough that workers could afford consumer goods, they kept capitalists from destroying their consumer base. This peace treaty between capitalists and workers—the Fordist compromise—stabilized capitalism throughout the so-called First World for much of the 20th century. But nothing can be stable for long under capitalism; by the beginning of the 21st century, mechanization and globalization had undermined whatever leverage and security most workers had possessed. This caused a concomitant decline in profits, as workers had less to spend, and more and more capital was invested in financial speculation—resulting in the financial crises that serve as the backdrop for the events this article describes.



June 2011, Athens, Greece. At least 300,000 people demonstrate against austerity measures; unofficially, it could be as many as half a million. A general strike and massive rioting follow.

February 2015, Athens, Greece. A few hundred anarchists riot against the new government. The same austerity measures still apply, but they are alone in the streets.





*From Die Linke in Germany . . .*

everywhere, these protests became a space in which people who would never previously have been politically aligned could express their anger together; in many places, such as Bosnia, the most militant participants were people who had never taken the streets before. Trust in parliamentary democracy plunged to a record low, and people rediscovered direct action.

Those protests were anything but monolithic, and they remained more reformist than radical. Many peaked with small victories, such as the resignation of the government (as in Slovenia) or the promise of negotiations with the political elite (as in Bosnia). Participants who had expected easy changes were disappointed. But the volatile situation posed an increasing threat to the ruling order.

The state's first reaction was to criminalize resistance. On one hand, this was intended to intimidate those who were protesting for the first time: often the harshest sentences were doled out to the least experienced participants, who lacked support networks. On the other hand, repression was focused on anarchists and other determined enemies of the ruling order. In the past decade, we've seen social centers evicted from Denmark's Ungdomshuset to Villa Amalias in Greece, and "anti-terror" crackdowns on dissent such as Operation Pandora in Spain and the continuing harassment of anarchists in the UK. Spain, Greece, and other countries also introduced severe anti-protest laws.

The other response was to seek to coopt these movements. Protesters had proclaimed "NO ONE

REPRESENTS US"—not just as a complaint about the existing parties, but also as a rejection of representation and liberal democracy. People who had just discovered their own political power were experimenting with direct action and collective decision-making processes such as the popular assemblies in Spain, Greece, and Bosnia. In response, patronizing intellectuals and corporate media outlets demanded that protesters form political parties to unify their voices and negotiate with the state. At the same time, new political parties were positioning themselves within those movements by advocating for imprisoned protesters (as Syriza did in Greece), backing protesters' agendas in the media and parliament (as Združena levica did in Slovenia), and sharing resources (as Die Linke did in Germany). They appeared to be developing a party-movement model, incorporating protest groups and demands into their organizational structure.

Syriza has its own unique origins in the specific context of Greece. So do Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany, Parti de Gauche in France, Radnička fronta in Croatia, Združena levica in Slovenia, and Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal. But at this historical juncture, all of them serve the same basic function. Faced with so much unrest, the ruling order suddenly has a use for new radical political parties that promise to embody calls for "real democracy" within the existing system. Whatever the intentions of the participants, their structural role is to rebuild trust in electoral democracy, neutralize uncontrollable extra-parliamentary movements, and reestablish



... to Podemos in Spain, all eyes are on Greece.

capitalism and the state as the only imaginable social order. When these radical politicians enter the halls of power, they commit themselves to perpetuating the authoritarian institutions and unequal distribution of wealth that triggered the movements from which they appeared in the first place.

In tumultuous times, those who benefit from the prevailing order are willing to risk small changes in order to avoid big ones. The emerging electoral popularity of these parties all over Europe suggests that the chapter that opened with the Greek uprising of December 2008 has closed. If all goes according to precedent, these parties will re-stabilize capitalism and state power, then pass from the stage of history, to be replaced by—or become—the next defenders of the status quo.

## Greece, Periphery of the Future

Greece was at the forefront of these processes from the beginning. Greek comrades took to the streets years before revolt spread from Egypt to Brazil, and they have never really left them, while the troika of lenders that bailed out the Greek economy—the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—imposed package after package of austerity measures.

To illustrate what those measures look like on the ground, we may recall how anarchist groups across Europe collected money a few years ago for

a Greek comrade who needed to get her infant out of the country for a life-saving medical operation. Due to financial cuts, the Greek state had simply stopped performing certain surgeries. This is just one story among many, and most people did not have the privilege of a community to support them thus. While the fascists of the Golden Dawn killed comrades like Pavlos Fyssas on the streets and the police killed migrants on the Greek borders of Fortress Europe, the state killed poor people on the doorsteps of hospitals by denying them health care.

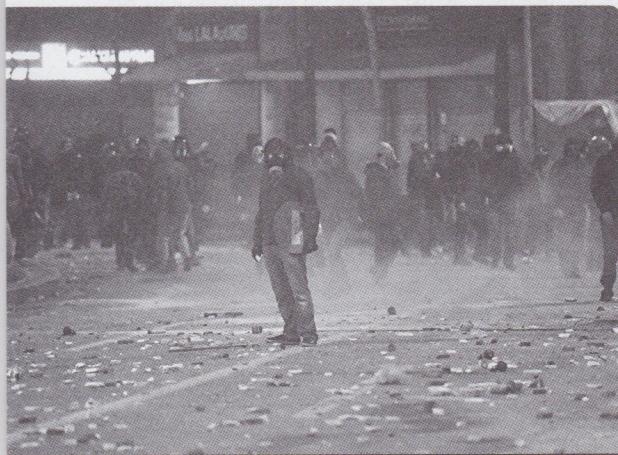
As the state closed down hospitals, television stations, schools, and kindergartens, anarchists and others self-organized to set up autonomous clinics, educational projects, public kitchens, social programs, and neighborhood assemblies. Over the following years, the Greek anarchist movement became a major social force, mobilizing tens of thousands of people to fight beside them. At the same time, these polarizing conditions also benefitted fascists in Greece. The fascist political party Golden Dawn gained power in parliament as police officers swelled their ranks. Police repression of anarchist demonstrations became ceaselessly and ruthlessly violent, while the far-right-controlled media maintained a conspiracy of silence and prisoners filled the new maximum-security prisons built under the most conservative government since the military junta fell in the 1970s.

These were the conditions in which a small coalition of Trotskyists, Maoists, Greens, and social democrats began to gain popularity under the name

Syriza and the leadership of Alexis Tsipras. When thousands of people who did not belong to anarchist or leftist groups marched with anarchists and clashed with police in the fight against gold mining in Chalkidiki, the defense of the social center Villa Amalias, the struggle against Golden Dawn, and demonstrations in solidarity with immigrants, Syriza took positions on the same issues. They spoke about them in a parliament and their members attended the demonstrations. Whenever possible, they took advantage of these struggles to gain recognition in the media.

Syriza always had less power to mobilize people onto the street than anarchists, but the party successfully mobilized people to go to the voting polls. This aptly illustrates the transition that Syriza's supposed enemies would like to see social movements undergo in Greece and all around Europe. Although the rhetoric that made Syriza popular—about ending austerity, leaving NATO, and dismantling the most brutal police units—softened even before the elections, some anxiously declared that their victory would bankrupt Greece, or provoke a civil war. Rumors circulated that there would be electoral fraud or even a military coup if Syriza received the most votes.

Immediately after the election, as Syriza set about accommodating itself to the needs of the EU elite, it became clear that all this apprehension had simply



*Wrong way: where street fighting reached a dead end, Syriza stepped in to direct energy back into representative politics.*

concealed the fact that—compared to the social movements from which it arose—Syriza was a much safer bet for the capitalist class. The reactions of the representatives of global finance capital to Syriza's victory have been harsh in rhetoric but reconcilable in practice. Just as police brutality can catalyze

rather than suppress resistance, electoral fraud or military intervention might have triggered a new wave of movements in Greece and all across Europe. In a globalized world, in which a country can go bankrupt overnight, capitalists don't need to stage a coup to get their way.

Syriza's supporters are justifying its backsliding on the grounds that its enemies are currently too powerful—that it is waiting for other parties with similar agendas to come to power. This attempt to *buy time* is not incidental, but rather characteristic of Syriza's entire project: they wish to buy time with the EU negotiators, but also with the people of Greece and above all with profit-driven capitalism itself, as if that ceaselessly intensifying process could somehow be slowed or reversed. If they were serious about solving the problems capitalism causes, they wouldn't be a political party in the first place.

## **Our Dreams Will Never Fit in Their Ballot Boxes**

For those who see no connection between the ways that electoral politics and capitalism concentrate power, it's tempting to imagine that a new political party could finally make the system work the way "it is supposed to." But even anarchists, who have no faith in representational politics or reform, might hope that a Syriza-led government could create a more conducive environment for resistance. Indeed, it is an open secret that members of Syriza have served as the lawyers of many anarchists; why shouldn't they continue to play a protective role at the helm of the state?

All this is hopelessly naïve. In the long run, no party can solve the problems created by capitalism and the state, and the victory of parties like Syriza will only hinder the revolutionary movements that we need. This is for three basic reasons.

### **I. Syriza will reestablish the legitimacy of the institutions that are responsible for the crisis in the first place.**

Indeed, the entry of Syriza into power has already re-legitimized the institutions of government for many who had lost faith in them, both in Greece and elsewhere around Europe. Regardless of the intentions of specific politicians, it is this same government apparatus that forces the effects of capitalism upon people, blocking access to the resources they need. Even if it were possible for an elected party like Syriza



Syriza: the party for your right to fight?

to use state power to combat the effects of capitalist accumulation, sooner or later the reins of the state will return to the hands of those who usually hold them. When that happens, efforts to delegitimize government will have to begin all over again.

This cycle of disillusionment and re-legitimization has served to preserve the structures of the state for centuries, perpetually deferring the struggle for freedom beyond the horizon. It's an old story stretching from the French revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1870, through the Russian revolution and the national liberation struggles of the 20th century, right up to the election of Obama.

Many of these new left parties started as ostensibly horizontal networks, promising transparent and democratic decision-making processes; some include radical factions that openly disagree with the leadership. But as they grow, they inevitably abandon horizontal structures and come to mimic the older parties they claim to oppose. These changes are often justified as political pragmatism or solutions to the problem of scale—the exigencies of representational politics do not lend themselves to the sort of horizontal, autonomous structures that can arise in genuine grassroots social movements.

So it is that at the top of every successful party like Syriza, Združena levica, or Podemos, we can expect to find a charismatic leader like Alexis Tsipras, Luka Mesec, or Pablo Iglesias. These leaders' personalities become entangled with the parties, in ways reminiscent of Hugo Chavez and other famous politicians of the Left. If you are building a party that has to play according to state's rules, you will end up with a structure that mirrors the state. This internal transformation is the first step towards re-establishing the status quo.

Leftist parties have always displayed a contradictory attitude towards the state. In theory, they assert that the state is merely a necessary evil on the path towards a classless society; on the field of realpolitik, they always defend and extend its repressive mechanisms—for no one who wishes to hold state power can do without them. Some of these new parties do not even wait to gain power to take that path; in Slovenia, as part of their struggle against austerity, the left opposition party Združena levica called for the police to receive better equipment and more officers. These new parties see state power as essential for their struggle against neoliberalism; rejecting the privatization of state owned companies, they

propose nationalization as one of the primary ways to fight the consequences of economic crisis. Their goal is not to dismantle the state and the economic disparities it imposes, but to preserve the bourgeois ideal of the welfare state with a neo-Keynesian economic program.

When this was possible in the past, it was only possible for a few privileged nations at the expense of exploited millions around the globe—and even the beneficiaries of this arrangement weren't sure they wanted it, as the countercultural rebellions of the 1960s showed. Today, when capitalist accumulation has intensified to such a degree that only massive austerity programs can keep the economy running, the old compromises of social democracy have become impossible, and everyone acknowledges this except the snake oil salesmen of the left. The doomsaying of German economists who are concerned that Syriza will sink the Greek economy is true enough: in a globalized economy, there is no way to redistribute wealth without causing capital flight, unless we are prepared to abolish capitalism along with the state structures that preserve it.

Most of the participants in the movements of the past seven years are not yet prepared to go so far. They entered the streets out of frustration with the existing governments, but they saw these movements as a way to seek an immediate solution, not as a single stage in a centuries-long struggle against capitalism. When the protests didn't produce immediate results, they joined parties like Syriza that promised quick, easy solutions. But what seems pragmatic today will be an embarrassing mistake that everyone remembers with a headache tomorrow. Isn't that always how it goes with parties?

## **II. Syriza has no choice now except to enforce order, pacifying the movements that propelled it into power.**

We can't predict what the precise relationships will be between governing parties like Syriza and the movements that put them in place, but we can speculate based on past precedents.

Let's return to the Brazilian example. After Lula came to power, the most powerful social movement in Brazil, the 1.5-million-strong land reform campaign MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra), found itself in a considerably worse position than it had faced under the preceding conservative government. Although it shared membership and leadership with Lula's own party, the necessities of

governing precluded Lula from assisting it. MST organizers were sucked out of their positions and into government positions, draining resources and experience from grassroots efforts. At the same time, the new administration was well positioned to defer the demands of its supporters, but poorly positioned to grant them without losing leverage in the government. Though the MST had managed to compel the previous government to legalize many land occupations, it ceased to make any headway whatsoever under Lula.

This pattern has played out all across Latin America as politicians betrayed the social movements that put them in office. It's a good argument for building up strength we can use on our own terms, autonomously, rather than trying to get sympathetic politicians into office—for once they are in office, they must act according to the logic of their post, not the logic of the movement.

Syriza came to power by courting votes and watered down demands. Representative democracy tends to reduce politics to a matter of lowest common denominators, as parties jockey to attract voters and form coalitions. Indeed, Syriza's first move after the election was to establish a coalition with Independent Greeks, a right-wing party. In order to preserve such coalitions, parties like Syriza have to make concessions to their partners' agendas. This means, first, forcing unwanted right-wing policies past their own members—and then enforcing those policies on everyone else. There's no getting around the essentially coercive nature of governing.

Many anarchists hoped Syriza would put the brakes on state repression of social movements, enabling them to develop more freely. Didn't Syriza essentially support the riots of 2008? But back then, they were a small party looking for allies; now they are in power. In order to retain the reins of the state, they must show that they are prepared to enforce the rule of law. Though they may not prosecute minor protest activity as aggressively as a right-wing government would, they still have to divide protesters into legitimate and illegitimate—as governments and occupying armies do the whole world over, working from the counterinsurgency playbook. This is not new for Greece; the same thing happened under the social democrats of PASOK in the early 1980s. Even if Syriza's government does not maintain the previous level of repression, they will undertake to divide movements, incorporating the docile and marginalizing the rest. This might prove a more effective repressive strategy than brute force.

In these new conditions, movements themselves will change. As parties like Syriza become involved



*Crowds celebrating Syriza's victory under the Greek flag.*

in grassroots social programs, they will offer the most cooperative of these projects more resources, but only under the mantle of the state. It will become harder and harder for grassroots organizers to remain truly autonomous, to demonstrate the difference between self-organization and management from above. Something like this has already occurred in the US non-profit sector, with disastrous effects. We may also cite government involvement in supposedly grassroots neighborhood organizing in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez.

Parties like Syriza need movements that know how to behave themselves, that can serve to legitimize decisions made in the parliament without causing too much of a fuss. Indeed, the mere prospect that Syriza might come into power kept the streets of Greece largely empty of protest starting in 2012, intensifying the risks for anarchists and others who continued to demonstrate. Parties on this model can pacify the public without even entering office.

### **III. Where Syriza fails, fascism will grow.**

Facing international pressure, a divided electorate, and the structural relationship between state and capital, Syriza cannot hope to resolve the day-to-day problems that most Greeks face as a result of

unbridled capitalism.\* In the long term, this may open the gates for the last governmental solution that Greece has not yet tried: fascism.

A profit-driven economy inevitably concentrates wealth into fewer and fewer hands. In a globalized world, any country that tries to reverse this process scares off investors; this is why today even the wealthiest nations are being forced to feed all the infrastructure of social democracy into the fire, keeping the market healthy at the expense of the general population. This problem could be solved by the revolutionary abolition of private property and the state that defends it, but there is only one way to preserve the support infrastructure of social democracy while maintaining capitalism, and that is to narrow down who benefits from it. This is the meaning of the food distribution programs Golden Dawn organizes "for Greeks only." In this regard, nationalist and fascist parties have a more realistic plan for how to maintain the safety net of the white middle class than ordinary socialist parties do.

That's why it is so dangerous for parties like Syriza to legitimize the idea that the government could solve the problems of capitalism by implementing

\* Anything Syriza accomplishes in this field is bound to be merely cosmetic, like the monthly allowance Lula arranged for the poorest families in Brazil. More significantly, it will take the form of charity rather than self-organization, rendering those who have the greatest cause to be angry the most dependent upon the authorities.



*The other socialists with Greek flags—the nationalist ones. A Golden Dawn rally in Athens in February 2014.*

more socialistic policies. When they fail to deliver on their promises, some of those who believed in them will turn to far-right parties who claim to have a more pragmatic way to accomplish the same thing. This is already happening all around Europe. In Sweden, the flagship of social democracy, decades of left-wing activism aimed at preserving government programs have opened the way for fascists to claim that, in order to protect those programs, the borders must close.

But fascists need not take power to be dangerous. They are dangerous precisely because, like anarchists, they can carry out their agenda directly without need of the state apparatus. Indeed, we may be entering an era when a variety of political actors will find it more strategic to position themselves outside the government, so as to avoid being discredited with it. Now that the state can no longer mitigate the effects of capitalism, people are bound to become more and more disillusioned and rebellious. Where radical left parties hold state power, seeking to pacify their former comrades who remain in the streets, it will be easier for right-wing groups to present themselves as the real partisans of revolt—as they have in Venezuela, for example. The insurrections of the past decade are sure to continue, but the important question is what kind of insurrections they will be. Will they put people in touch with their own collective power, setting

the stage for the final abolition of capitalism? Or will they look more like what happened in Ukraine in winter of 2013-14, when a nationalistic uprising opened the way for civil war?

With anti-Islamic hysteria and nationalist groups like Germany's Pegida on the rise all over Europe, fascism is not just a future threat, but a clear and present danger. Leaving it to governments to deal with fascists via the rule of law is doubly dangerous: it supplants the agency of grassroots movements with the mediation of the authorities, and—once more—it legitimizes state institutions that may eventually fall into fascist hands. Some may consider parties like Syriza a bulwark against fascism, but only autonomous social movements can defeat it: not simply by fighting against it reactively, but above all by demonstrating a more compelling vision of social change.

## **Fighting Harder, Wanting More**

If Syriza's victory succeeds in lulling those who once met in the streets back into spectatorship and isolation, this will close the windows of possibility that opened during the uprisings, rendering Syriza redundant and offering a new model by which to pacify social movements around the world. But such parties



*Still our last best hope: on December 6, 2014, six years after the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, demonstrators reaffirm the value of autonomous direct action.*

are playing with fire, promising solutions they cannot deliver. If their failure could open the door for fascism, it could also create a new generation of movements outside and against all authoritarian power.

For this to be possible, anarchists in Greece and everywhere around the world must once more differentiate ourselves from all political parties, inviting the general public to join us in spaces beyond the influence of even the most generous social

democrats. This means facing off against the opportunistic politicians who once joined us in the street. If nothing else, when elections put parties like Syriza on the other side of the walls of power, the lines become clear.

The appearance of these new political parties coincides with a wave of defeats in the streets, as the anti-austerity and anti-corruption movements of the last decade have died down. But if these practices

reached an impasse, as they did in Greece in 2012, it was partly because people abandoned the streets in hopes that political parties could do the work for them. Above all, this was a failure of imagination: abolishing capitalism and the state is still unthinkable for most people. Yet as Greece has witnessed, the measures that could preserve capitalism for another generation are still more unthinkable—whether it is conservative politicians or radical ones imposing them. We are entering a new phase of this conflict. If Syriza-style parties are the latest strategy for the preservation of state and capital, we should answer with a renewed commitment to complete self-determination, opening new opportunities for others to imagine a world without capitalism or political parties. Whoever is elected, let us be ungovernable.

**“A Syriza government, taking into account that its life will be short, should serve as a challenge to the struggle. We should force them to reveal their true face, which is no other than the face of capitalism, which can neither be humanized nor rectified but only destroyed.”**

— Nikos Romanos, writing from prison in Greece

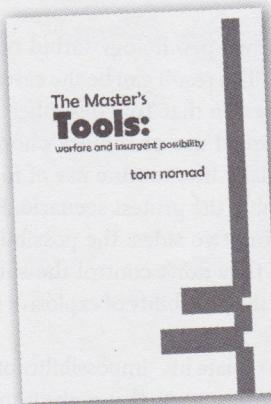


## Dogs of Greece— A Political Primer

[left] Loukanikos, the celebrated “riot dog” who made a name for himself by participating in every demonstration in Athens since 2010, represents the fighting spirit of autonomous movements. Unfortunately, he reportedly passed away in 2014, having retired from street action in 2012 to wait for Syriza to assume power.

[center] Golden Dawg, a fascist lapdog serving the capitalist elite, is happy to show his teeth from the safety of his master’s arms. He pretends to have his own agenda—but note the leash!

[right] And here is the latest addition to the Greek kennel, a canine partisan of Syriza. “Throw me a bone,” he says! Some see him as Loukanikos’s successor, but there appear to be a few differences. As for the leash, he insists it’s just a matter of pragmatism: “A leash is just a tool like any other,” he says. “If it’s in the right hands, you can do good things with it.”



## The Master's Tools: Warfare and Insurgent Possibility

Tom Nomad

Little Black Cart, 2014

In early 2008, the anarcho-hipster journal *Politics Is Not a Banana* published a manifesto called “Plan B: Our Exit Strategy out of Activism and the Next Expression of an Autonomous Social Force.” Starting from experiences in anti-globalization black blocs, the authors argued for a synthesis of insurrectional anarchists’ clandestine attacks and community anarchists’ social relationships. Practically, this meant entering protests and other volatile gatherings ready to riot. The communities that coalesced would be united by shared practical inclinations, rather than bloodless ideas.

“Plan B” critiqued the activist discourse of effectiveness for delegitimizing actions that didn’t explain themselves to the movement. For the manifesto’s authors, activists were writing all the messy, irrational aspects out of the radical history they tried to reenact. A coherent, systematic schema for designating targets might sound good on paper, but it tells police what to guard. While this might not stop nighttime saboteurs, who can choose their timing and manner of attack, aspiring rioters don’t have that luxury. What orients them must be useless to the police: an immediate desire for conflict, unregulated by fantasies of efficiency.

*The Master’s Tools: Warfare and Insurgent Possibility*, a collection of essays inspired by military theory, aims to break the impasse between discredited activist strategies and the “tactical essentialism” that replaced them. For author Tom Nomad, the critique of effectiveness throws the baby out with the bathwater. It’s right to reject overarching conceptual schemes, whether moral or sociological, as a universal metric for actions. But by transposing the language of “attack” from clandestine to participatory contexts without questioning it, “Plan B” replaces those metrics with its own universalism. Attack comes to mean a narrow repertoire of vandalism, applied to every situation by default. We’re still asking how actions measure up to an idea—we just call it a desire instead of a principle. Instead we should be asking how actions work. That, to Tom, is real effectiveness: a

way of seeing based on our immediate experience of social conflict on the ground. *The Master’s Tools* hopes to build that way of seeing.

Tom started his writing career with a primer on police crowd control, reprinted as the first chapter of this book. The defining experiences were massive clashes of cops and protesters in the era of summit protests. As that era declined, he broadened his focus to a more general question: what were police really doing when they clashed with protesters—or patrolled their daily beat—and why did they sometimes fail?

The key word is *projection*. Police can’t be everywhere at once, but their task is to regulate everything at once. To do this, they have to project their force: extend its effects beyond their immediate location in space and time. This can be as simple as using guns, cars, and surveillance cameras—all late additions to the police force. It can also involve deeper projects to construct the *terrain of policing*, like the planners who rebuilt Paris with wide, straight boulevards after they learned how hard it was to control riots in narrow, irregular streets. Terrain is social as much as physical; in an apt example, Tom calls undercovers and snitching initiatives a projection of police power into our human environment, designed to “destroy our ability to trust” (109).

Projection needs a conducive medium. Surveillance cameras don’t see as far in the fog. Patrol cars can’t go anywhere on gridlocked streets. But the biggest obstacle to effective projection is police action itself. If five squad cars are tied down on a routine traffic stop, they’re not patrolling. If a platoon of riot cops is defending city hall, they can’t tackle you for smashing bank windows a block away. Usually these gaps in coverage pass by without incident, but illegal actions within them create a crisis for projection. The result is either unpunished illegality or an overcommitment of force that creates larger gaps elsewhere.

Like projection, crises in projection are not just physical. Even if the only side effect of police overreaction is resentment and mistrust from the people

it affects, this makes us an unconducive medium for the social aspects of projection.

Tom draws an extreme conclusion: “the police exist as a logistical form of organization that attempts to accomplish the impossible” (102). The “impossible” is a social order where one event always leads to the next in predictable ways, where everything unfolds according to strict laws (a “conceptual unity of time and space,” in his language). Like some poststructuralist philosophers, Tom doesn’t believe laws of human behavior are ever purely descriptive. They’re always part of the machinery for suppressing deviance, or what he calls “possibility.” Thus, even relations of cause and effect, state strategies’ raw material, depend on the projection of force—just like laws in the narrow sense. When an act goes outside the consensus view of what’s practically possible, that projection breaks down.

From this perspective, the power of attack is not the feelings it expresses or the calculable sequence of events it initiates, but the gap it introduces in all the calculable sequences around it. If someone in a black bloc smashes a window, the resulting monetary impact is as irrelevant as the motivating anger; what matters is the brief window of unpredictability that ensues. When we think of attack in this way, we can ask *how much* unpredictability an act will create, *how long* it will last, *how accessible* the gaps in projection will be to us or anyone else.

Not all readers will agree with Tom’s philosophical arguments for the power of possibility. Often, states work by containment, not elimination. Possibilities are fine as long as the probabilities stay low. Police quarantine deviance: either by marking off a class of deviant people—criminals—or by helping us all compartmentalize our own deviant behavior and keep it within bounds. It’s true that every unscripted act, like every engagement in a war, changes the tactical terrain around it, opening up new possibilities and closing off old ones. The question is whether these unpredictable changes can be managed. Tom simply assumes they can’t.

In some circumstances, possibility is enough—but not for metaphysical reasons. Police learn early on that if they can’t see a non-compliant subject’s hands, those hands could be pulling a gun. The textbook procedure is to threaten lethal force from a distance until their subject complies. Here, the mere possibility that *something* could happen means that *anything* could happen; uncertainty might mean death. In the protest context that inspired Tom’s early work, this puts cops in a double bind. Their training tells them any uncontrolled non-compliance is an unacceptable level of threat, but political pressure and

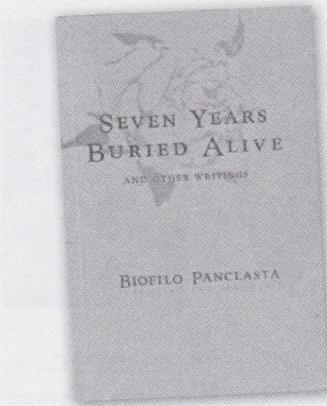
the doctrines of crowd psychology forbid normal control procedures. The result can be the cascading breakdown of projection that Tom describes.

With the widespread use of camera phones to monitor police in daily life, routine use of force is beginning to resemble the protest scenario. Police face uncertainty from two sides: the possibility of lethal resistance if they don’t control the subjects they approach, and the possibility of explosive social backlash if they do.

Since Tom doesn’t relate his “impossibility of total policing” to the circumstances that make it matter, he doesn’t imagine circumstances in which it won’t. If there’s a growth industry in government today, though, it’s the science of flexible control: managing crisis without preventing it. We usually imagine technocrats who want the whole world to look like Google, with smart algorithms that rewrite their own rules to match unfolding situations. But lynch law was flexible control too; when the state could no longer legislate a racial order, “natural aversions” filled the gap. The more the impossibilities of policing come to the fore, the more we can expect similar divisions of labor to reappear. An absolutely administered future might feel a lot like the Wild West.

This brings us back to the question of effectiveness. Tom rejects “conceptual” framings of effectiveness, from Marxist sociology to Deep Green Resistance, but when he talks about effectiveness as “the achievement of material objectives” (84), it’s hard to see what’s different. He seems to think that once we get to a certain level of particularity—*this moment, this street, this cop car*—the link between action and objective will be self-evident. But if effects are “shifts in the terrain of action that we call a world” (91), and terrain is attitudes, information, channels of communication as much as bricks and mortar, then this self-evidence is doubtful. Our priorities shape which effects we see.

By treating effectiveness as immediate, non-conceptual knowledge, Tom risks reducing anarchist action to a mirror image of flexible control. As police and vigilantes construct probabilistic perimeters around unpredictable zones, anarchists will construct probabilistic pathways across those perimeters—“amplifying crisis”—without asking about the *other* effects of that construction. To ask about these invisible effects is to ask about the “we” that’s acting and the “we” that each action creates—questions an earlier generation fixated on. If we defer those questions till our administered reality gives way to a free play of friendships and enmities, as *The Master’s Tools* subtly suggests, we’ll get no further than the cutting edge of empire.



## Seven Years Buried Alive, and Other Writings

Biófilo Panclasta

Ritmomaquia Press, 2013

Let's start with the facts. In 1907, the International Anarchist Congress took place in Amsterdam, drawing anarchists from around the world. Errico Malatesta argued against individualism and syndicalism; Emma Goldman chaired the final session, during which one Jacob Van Rees unsuccessfully attempted to push through a resolution in favor of sobriety. All this is thoroughly documented.\*

In Lizarazo's biographical sketch of 1939, included in this disorderly little anthology of works by and about Colombian anarchist Biófilo Panclasta, the young Panclasta attended the 1907 Congress and was arrested after taking to the streets with Kropotkin. (According to all other available sources, Kropotkin was not present at the Amsterdam congress, nor did it end in demonstrations.)

Lizarazo's story goes that when the news reached Colombia that "the Colombian delegate has been imprisoned in Holland," the Colombian president, misunderstanding this to mean his delegate to the international Peace Conference in the Hague, indignantly demanded the captive's release. Only afterwards did the president learn that he had arranged the liberation of an obscure and recalcitrant

\* See contemporary coverage of the Congress by Freedom Press, or the Black Cat Press centennial *The International Anarchist Congress: Amsterdam (1907)*—neither of which mention anything about a Biófilo Panclasta, a Vicente Lizcano, or anyone from Colombia. In fact, only one delegate associated with any Latin American nation is named—an Italian representing Argentina.

anarchist. "Biófilo?" we imagine the Colombian president shouting, pounding his fist on the table. "That's not even a real name! Who is this Biófilo?"

So Biófilo Panclasta entered history as an error wrapped in a misunderstanding, a doubtful chimaera. Who was he, indeed?

In his 25<sup>th</sup> year, having already experienced the Venezuelan revolution and Colombian civil war, disillusioned with military strongmen seeking power for its own sake, the young adventurer Vicente Lizcano took the name Biófilo Panclasta ("lover of life, destroyer of everything") and set out in search of the world. Three years later, he was in Europe—that much seems certain—and the rest, as they say, is mystery. Connoisseur of a hundred jails, hounded from border to border like the protagonist of B. Traven's *The Death Ship*, preaching a jumble of individualism and atheism to whoever would listen, this peripatetic autodidact became the patron saint of vagabondage and obscurity.

Rafael Gómez Picón's 1936 interview with Panclasta, also included in this volume, gives another version of the story of the Amsterdam congress: as a delegate of the National Argentine Workers' Federation, Panclasta angered the authorities with an inflammatory speech; to punish him, they handed him over directly to the Colombian delegates to the Peace Congress. But Picón also asserts that Panclasta tried to shoot the German Kaiser and dynamite the

**"Biófilo did exist," insisted Gonzalo Buenahora, who fictionalized Panclasta in his novel Blood and Oil. "He came from the whole world, from setting bombs and whatever else . . . I would have got everything he said if I had a recorder. He was a superb liar and made things up, but he was great, really great, a whole novel of a man."**

*Biófilo Panclasta,  
patron saint of historical obscurity.*



President of France—that he slapped the Tsar, gave a sermon from the Mount of Olives, and tromped from Alexandria to Beijing by way of Bombay.

Panclasta himself—much earlier, in 1910—described his visit to Europe without referencing the congress, enumerating all the famous anarchists he met and mentioning that he was arrested on December 7, 1907: a month and a half after the conference in the Hague had ended. Even this account is surely slanted; as usual, he was addressing a journalist from jail. Should we believe the caricatures of the newspapers, or the stories Panclasta spun for them? Or anarchist publications—like this anthology, and *Rolling Thunder* too—that appropriate his legacy for yet another agenda?

We are in the realm of myth, where everything turns to fog. Did Panclasta really live in Paris with Lenin, the two of them so poor they shared a single pair of shoes? (Lenin's biographers don't think so.) Did he really bomb the Archbishop of Cartagena? (I'm still searching for the news item that apparently reports this.) Did he really cohabit with a witch in Bogotá, an ex-nun who told fortunes for a living? (If he did, it seems to have been at the juncture of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.)

Forget about the facts, then. Imagine Panclasta arriving on the steamer to Europe, sea froth washing the foreign shore, the immensity of the world around and above, cradling him in the unknown. There is no tale tall enough to convey such moments in their full intensity.

Only mythology leaves enough open space for us to project ourselves into the story. In myths, we recognize our own lives, transformed, writ large as the adventures we deserve. That is what thrills in the fragments that reach us from Panclasta's pen: the breathless prose pointing beyond the page, loving portrayals of men who did not even enter legend, unexplored continents sunk deep as Atlantis. The dark matter of History.

In that fog, hoboes sprawl around dying coals; the eldest is recounting Fourier's fantasias, which the

youngest will set to music as "The Big Rock Candy Mountain." Louise Michel sits at her desk, ghostwriting Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Jules Bonnot drives Arthur Conan Doyle across London, chatting about firearms. On the Siberian horizon, we make out the hulking figure of Bakunin, crouched in the tundra, thawing frozen mammoth over a campfire en route to Japan.

All this is viewed with disdain by historians—statist and anarchist—who painstakingly reconstruct the lives of their subjects from the archives of the police. There is no such thing as mythology, as far as they are concerned—only errors to debunk. From their perspective, it would be preferable if surveillance cameras and hidden microphones could be retroactively posted throughout the ages. Panclasta simply had the misfortune of hailing from a part of the world that was not as assiduous in documenting its public figures as France or Germany—to be one of the nobodies who, as Eduardo Galeano said, do not appear in the history of the world, but only in the local police blotter.\* An oversight to be corrected by a little anti-imperialist history, a little more research.

Our generation has almost perfected the total surveillance for which the historian yearns. But the realization of this project will mean the abolition of history itself. When every call is logged and every movement recorded, history will be the monstrosity Lewis Carroll describes in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*—a map of the world at a 1:1 ratio, so big it blots out the sun. "Of the past, what's best is what's forgotten," Panclasta quoted at the end of his life, declining to cite his source. If Prometheus were to return, in this age of illumination, he would bring us—darkness.

And in that darkness, Panclasta is at it again.

\* Indeed, before this anthology appeared, the only English-language material in print about Biófilo Panclasta was the deliberately butchered biography we forced into *Politics Is Not a Banana* (see *Rolling Thunder* #9) to lampoon the editors' penchant for poorly translated European texts.

**"Chimaera, be reality!"**

— Biófilo Panclasta

# Biófilo Panclasta: Anecdotes

## His Name

One day he was strolling by the edge of the sea. A shellfish had been imprisoned by a rock, under the weight of which it struggled uselessly in its affliction. Panclasta, obliging and affectionate, leaned down and set the little being free.

"But you, Panclasta, destroyer of all things, who loves life to this degree, deserve to be called Biófilo."

So it was that Lizcano, from Chinácota, completed his paradoxical and contradictory *nom de guerre*: Biófilo Panclasta, anarchist. With it he went on, then, traversing the world until he was acquainted with the prisons of three hundred seventy-seven European cities, in which he was locked away as a natural-born enemy of society.

J.A. Osorio Lizarazo. *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), #9835, February 12, 1939, Section 2.

## Confusion

He returns from Italy to Holland to attend an anarchist congress convened by Prince Kropotkin in Amsterdam. At the same time, in The Hague, there is a Peace Convention, to which the Colombian government, presided over by General Reyes, had sent Santiago Pérez Triana as a delegate. He was a fancy bourgeois from Zipaquirá.

As soon as the anarchist congress was underway, it was shut down by the Dutch police and our friend Panclasta was sent to prison with no tulips. The news was reported in somewhat garbled fashion by European newspapers; it arrived in Bogotá translated as: "Colombian delegate imprisoned in Holland." When the news reached President Reyes, he almost had a stroke. He ordered his chancellor to protest in the strongest terms for this assault on national honor, civilized customs, and international treaties. The Dutch government, somewhat confused about all the noise, had no other recourse but to free Biófilo, who right away packed up his bags. Destination: Russia.

Carlos Lozano. *Credencial* (Bogotá), N° 35, October 1989, pp. 37, 38.

## Biófilo and Lenin: Two Fugitives and a Pair of Shoes

In Russia he was condemned for life to merciless exile, with thousands of rebel youth who had been sentenced to die like Dostoyevsky's hero.

He planned an escape with a pale young man, of wide forehead and shaking hands, who was his friend, was beside him in his heroic deeds, supported his apostolate, and—by himself—ended up bringing about the very revolution that Panclasta and the nonconforming students had undertaken. His name was Vladimir Ulianov, but, like Panclasta, he had changed his name and was now known as Nikolai Lenin. Together they took the same dangerous journey as all of the victims of Tsarism to escape the white hell—the route of the eternal snows of the steppes towards the yellow seas where they could find the hope of freedom. A more knowledgeable biographer will write the story of the mad odyssey of Nikolai Lenin and Biófilo Panclasta through Siberia, China, and later the return by way of the mysterious seas of India or other exotic routes, finally reappearing in Paris in a tiny beggars' boarding house with one pair of shoes between them, which they traded off so as to go out with the dual objective of continuing their tireless apostolate and finding daily sustenance. Panclasta reached out to his Colombian compatriots to ask for cents; Lenin to Russian émigrés to ask for kopeks.

J. A. Osorio Lizarazo, *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), N° 9835, February 12, 1939, Section 2.

## A Bowl of Soup and Off to Jail

In Bogotá, where there is supposed to be an unstoppable socialist tendency, he showed up, shaking with hunger, at the inn of a propagandist; he asked for dinner, thinking that by merely saying his name he would earn any favor with an appeasing smile, but he didn't even get the apostle to sacrifice a plate on the altar of ideas, and he had to resign himself to a few days' sentence.

Joaquín Quijano Mantilla, *El Espectador* (Bogotá), N° 3044, April 4, 1920, p. 1



## A Dog's Life

One day, in Güepsa, in Santander, he came across a woman drowning some mangy dogs because she could not keep them. He snatched them up and led them to the hotel, where he fed them.

"Hit me or have them take me to jail; at least these animals will die with less hatred for people."

Joaquín Quijano Mantilla, *El Espectador* (Bogotá), N° 3044, April 4, 1920, p. 1

## Spitting on the Buyer

In Argentina, he was offered, through an eminent man, a well-salaried post to stop his political agitations. He turned it down jovially, and a day later he passed by the guy's house, escorted by a guard, having been found delivering an impassioned speech to the May strikers.

Joaquín Quijano Mantilla, *El Espectador* (Bogotá), N° 3044, April 4, 1920, p. 1

## Death Sentence

"In the name of God, of the Holy Mother Church, of monarchies, of conservative concentration, of all the Holy Crusades, of the good press and the clergy in general, I demand the head of the individual who answers to the name Biófilo Panclasta.

"Death to the Antichrist, *ipso facto!*  
"Death!!"

Pseudonymously signed by Juan el Cruzado, *Maquetas* (Bogotá), N° 1, February 23, 1911, p. 1

## Ignorance and Anarchy

One night, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1907, I was invited by the "Social Studies" group to refute a conference entitled "Anarchy Against Life" given by Bestraud. The orator expounded the same ideas that form my philosophical mentality. I passed the right to speak to Matta and I waited... Once he was finished, I said: "None of you knows what anarchism is; those of you that call yourselves anarchists, aren't, and those that don't, are." When I left I was sent right to jail.

Biófilo Panclasta, *El Pueblo* (Barranquilla), N° 219, April 18, 1910, p. 3.

## His First Expulsion

"I met Vicente Lizcano when the powerful energies of youth were still on his side. We studied together around 1897-1898, in the Escuela Normal of Bucaramanga. He was a simple and jovial fellow, of normal—if somewhat unbalanced—mental abilities. A rebel by temperament, the restlessness of his character often led him to grave transgressions of school discipline, which brought severe reprimands from his superiors and finally led to his definitive expulsion from the institution."

Rubén Sánchez N, *El Iris* (Ocaña), N° 458, March 22, 1942, p. 5.

## Suicide

Dying, the famous international agitator Biófilo Panclasta is in our city hospital after having attempted this morning and to put an end to his days for the second time, cutting his own throat with a razor. Two days earlier he had tried to electrocute himself with electrical cables after having delivered the following message to an agent of the police department:

"I come from Bogotá en route to Caracas. I got sick and lost everything. I have been a journalist and have traveled through the whole world, but I arrived poor and desperate and all have spurned me to the degree that death is the only recourse left. Only the police have had compassion for my agony. My independence notwithstanding, I think that I ought to free myself from the torments that afflict me. For the last time, and at the edge of the grave, I deny the existence of God."

Biófilo Panclasta, *El Deber* (Bucaramanga), #4830, January 31, 1940, pg. 1.

## Anarchic Bohemia

Biófilo Panclasta was carried to the prison on Thursday night. He was drunk and he would not pay twenty-five cents for a bottle of liquor. But Biófilo Panclasta was not in the habit of paying for liquor; and this is simply because he does not have any money with which to pay for it. And drunkenness is a state that is part of his personality as a drinker and beggar.

What was serious in all this is that he went to the presidio ten times in three months, all for the same reason: drunkenness and failure to pay for the liquor he drank. According to the regulations of the Police Code, this repeated offense placed Biófilo Panclasta among

the bums. Unfortunately, Bucaramanga has made this discovery too late. It can no longer be sensational.

*El Deber* (Bucaramanga), N° 5082, December 7, 1940, pp. 1-8.

## Imprisoned? Again!

In Ibabué, Señor Biófilo Panclasta has been confined to prison. The reasons are unknown.

Police blotter in *República* (Barranquilla), #244, February 21, 1913, pg 3.

## The Sermon from the Chair

This year, I decided to go to spend Holy Week in Pamplona. On Friday, at the lunch hour, when the small hotel where I was staying was packed with guests, I stood on a chair and began a lay sermon with these modest words: "The exalted redemption of Christ was a lie. According to the Biblical legend, because of sin—'certainly very original,' as Madame de Pompadour would say with such grace and intonation—committed with no shame by Adam and Eve in paradise, Jehovah condemned the former to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow and the latter to birth her children painfully. Jesus came with the very laudable intentions of redeeming humanity from this extreme sentence, but the facts show that the Man-God's sacrifice was barren, especially for the poor, since the mother is now freed from the pain of childbirth by means of painkillers in the famous 'waking dream,' in maternity clinics, while the men still continue earning their bread by the sweat of their brow..."

Having arrived at this point in my speech, the hotel's owners threw me out, indignant, calling me blasphemous and insane.

"Biófilo Panclasta", in Rafael Gómez Picón, *Estampillas de timbre parroquial*, Editorial Renacimiento, Bogotá, 1936, pp. 108, 109.

## The Libertarian Prisoner: Between Police and Prisoners

March 1, 1942, Biófilo Panclasta died for the last time in an old folks' home in Pamplona.

This man, who "wandered" between jails and billy clubs around the world, ironically ended up thinking that the only ones who had taken mercy on him in his agony were the police officers.

The idea never crossed his libertarian mind that those who carried his inert body to the cemetery would be prisoners: his universal companions.

Biófilo's burial was well attended, and the coffin was taken to the cemetery on the shoulders of prisoners. It is not currently known if he has any family.

Manuel José Carrasco, *Vanguardia Liberal* (Bucaramanga), N° 6987, March 7, 1942, pp. 1, 10.

## The Fire

After his long journey in Asia and Europe, Biófilo Panclasta arrived in Bucaramanga dressed in an old cloth suit, a white shirt, and white pants that had been a gift from his occasional companion, Rasputin. In his luggage he brought German copies of *Capital* and *The Holy Family* by Marx, signed by Lenin. He brought them tied together in a bag as proof of his friendship with the leader of the Russian Revolution. It is said that these books were burned by Father Adolfo García Cadena after the death of the eternal prisoner.

Orvim... *Testimonios*, Bogotá, March 1992.

## Take Down the Madman

One Holy Thursday, Monsignor Rafael Afanador y Cadena and his whole procession of the faithful were devotionally bearing the flagellated Lord to the tomb, when suddenly Biófilo Panclasta appeared on the balcony of Casa Anzóantegui and delivered a radical anarchist speech against religion and priests. His last words were "ignorant adorers of stick and plaster figures" and "religion is the opiate of the people." The Monsignor and his procession turned their Our Fathers and Holy Maries into desperate shouts of "He's a madman, take him down from there!" "He's drunk, to prison with him!"

Orvim... Armando Gómez Latorre, Bogota, March 1992.

## The Madman and the Clock

People in Pamplona say that in the final days of his life, Biófilo Panclasta escaped from the Old Folks' Home and, with much pain and difficulty, climbed the church tower. Once there, with shaking hands and a nostalgic gaze, he arrested the movement of the clock's hands, which so carefully marked the passage of time. The people looked, and said mechanically: "It's that crazy Biófilo again, trying to stop time!"

Biófilo was good for everything. It's also said that the mothers of Pamplona fattened up their boys with the threat: "If you don't eat your soup, I'm calling Biófilo."

Orvim... *Testimonios*, Bogotá, March 1992.

**So and So**

So and so that was next to me that day when they shot us with their guns  
So and so whose name I don't know so I always just call him cousin

So and so who shared his sandwich with me when I was filled with song and hunger  
So and so—I only remember his face, so and so who helped you cross the Square

So and so who searched me with a smile, so and so who said "Is he leaving?"  
So and so who waved me off when we said we are tired and leaving

So and so who would not take money for the ride when I said I was going to protest  
So and so who said: "Tomorrow he'll quit and we'll dance. It will be a great night"

So and so who handed me the bottle and put on the lid after I filled it with gas  
So and so who drank and offered me a sip, so and so whose face was filled with glass

So and so who did not appear on talk shows, just a voice in the middle of the chants  
So and so who went home to eat and bathe, so and so who was lost among the masses

So and so who sprayed my scarf with vinegar, carried me when I was shot in that clash  
So and so who died that day deserves justice from the so and so that ate his flesh

*Mohamed Ibrahim  
translated by Khaled Hegazzi and Andy Young*

This poem by Mohamed Ibrahim, a young poet who has been one of Egypt's voices of the revolution, riffs on the idea of the nameless people who were at the center of Egypt's January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution in 2011. The fact that no one has been held accountable for the deaths of the nearly 1000 people during the eighteen televised days of the revolution's beginning—nor for most of the thousands more deaths since—renders the “so and so” an ironic and damning refrain. Four years later, with a draconian protest law in place ensuring that any “so and so’s” with revolutionary sympathies are likely to be devoured by the “so and so’s” in power evoked at the end of the poem, Ibrahim’s poem serves to remind us of the struggle and its nobility, regardless of the present state of things.

RT

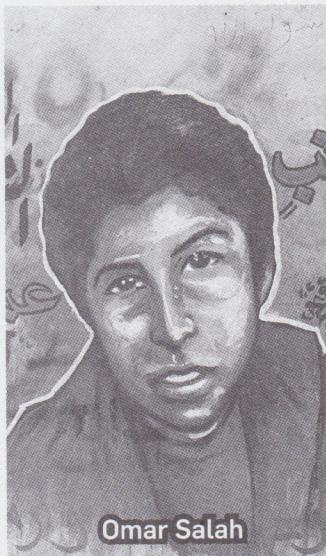
The images here depict and honor two of the martyrs of the revolution, Omar Salah and Mohamed El Guindy. Omar was a 12-year-old sweet potato seller helping to support his family, who was shot “accidentally”—twice—by military police outside the US Embassy in early 2013. His body was quickly taken away, hidden by everyone from the cops to the ambulance driver in an attempt to literally bury the murder. He was found only by chance, because his body was near Mohamed El Guindy’s in the notorious Zeinhom morgue. Mohamed El Guindy was tortured to death by Central Security Forces, his body also holed away in a warren of the morgue in hopes it would be forgotten. His friends from the No Military Trials group found him, and, in the process, found Omar Salah, whose body was laid out next to his. The efforts of the No Military Trials members,

many of whom are now imprisoned, ensured that at least these dead would not be “so and so’s” consigned to anonymity but given a name, an image, a story.

RT

Not much has changed with regard to Egypt’s police brutality, which triggered the revolution, since those iconic days of early 2011. Except perhaps that here in 2015, it’s just more blatant, flagrant. The military is back, the Sisi-cult crowned, and the powers-that-be act with impunity. Recently, for example, Shaimaa El Sabbagh, a poet and activist, was shot in the back in daylight (and on camera) by Central Security Forces. She was on her way to lay flowers for the dead of the revolution. It was the eve of the anniversary. How much more concrete can you make a metaphor?

The third image here reads “there is a martyr inside me,” which always struck me, the poetry of it, the idea of one’s complete, perfected death within the living body. But that’s a poet’s take. More than that, of course, there is a message: I’m willing to die for something larger. The word has less religious baggage in Arabic, (to me, anyway, raised a Catholic). And, at least in revolutionary terms, it supersedes religious context. That is, one can be a martyr whether Christian or Muslim or atheist. It has to do with what you are willing to give, beyond celebrity, beyond, even, your name. One can hope that the sacrifices, one day, pay off. Until then, it has been the work of many street artists, and is, indeed, the work of the living, to give the “so and sos” names and faces in the name of the justice Ibrahim invokes in the final line of his poem.



Omar Salah



Mohamed El Guindy





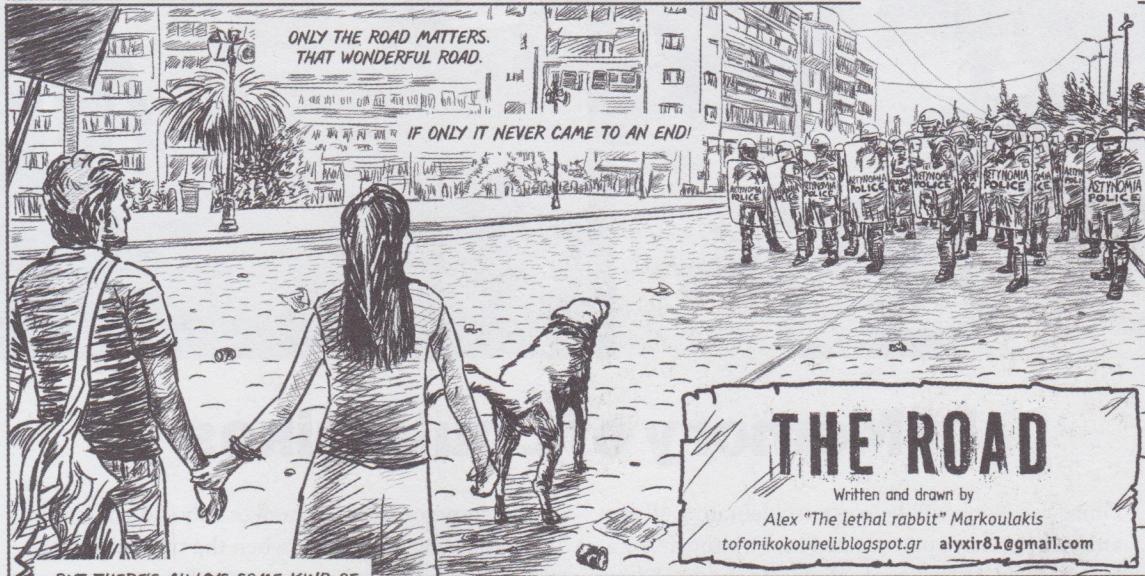
## In Memory of Loukanikos

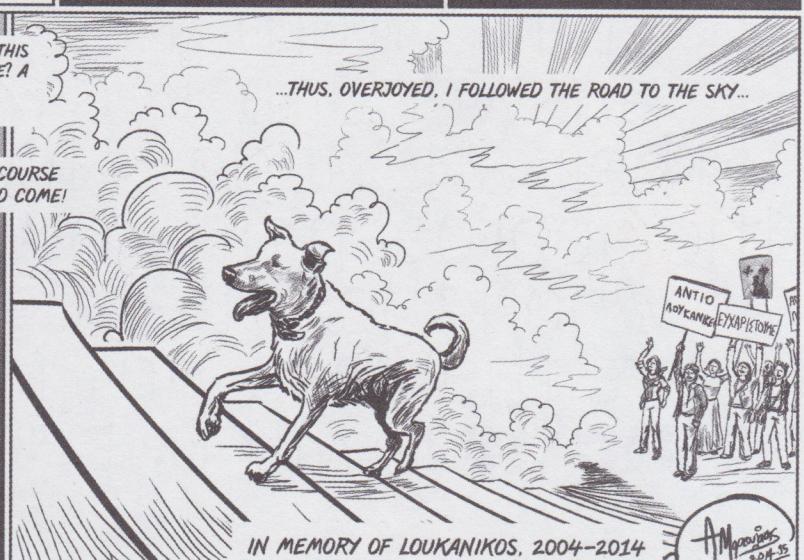
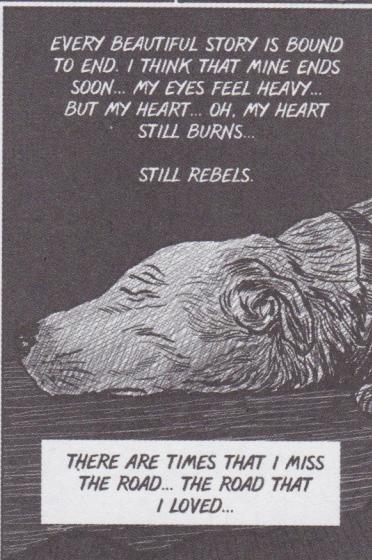
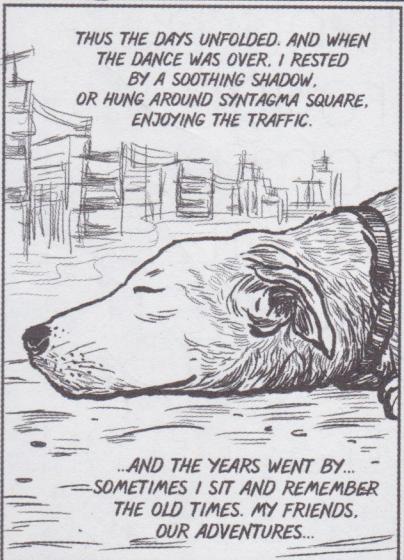
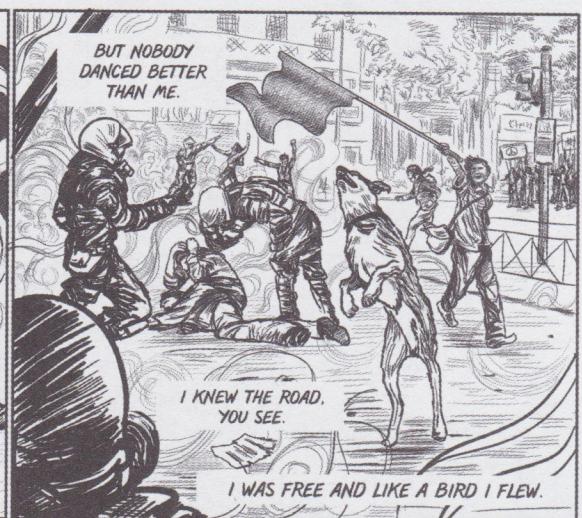
One day, a book will be written celebrating all the animals that have participated in the struggle for a better world. In that book, alongside the racehorse Barbarian (who pulled the getaway carriage when Peter Kropotkin escaped from prison and again when Stepiak assassinated the chief of the Russian secret police), we will read about the exploits of Loukanikos, a street dog living in downtown Athens. Like Kanelllos, Loukanikos was one of a series of “riot dogs” that joined Greek demonstrators on the streets.

From 2008 to 2012, Greece experienced massive protests against capitalist austerity programs. Loukanikos was always at the forefront of the clashes, taking the side of protesters against the riot police. Undaunted by tear gas, loyal to his comrades even as concussion grenades and Molotov cocktails flew, he set an example of cross-species solidarity—showing that the struggle against authoritarian governments and markets is of pressing concern not only to humans but to all life on earth. It’s not strange, after all, that man’s best friend would be capitalism’s worst enemy!

The story goes that Loukanikos only had a difficult time choosing sides once, when the trade union of the police protested in Syntagma Square against austerity policies that would reduce their wages. This was confusing: a demonstration of police against police, with all sides in uniform! Finally, however, one line of police brought out their shields and batons and began shooting tear gas at the other line. Everything snapped into focus, and Loukanikos took his place with the demonstrators. Even among pigs, a good dog always sides with the underdog.

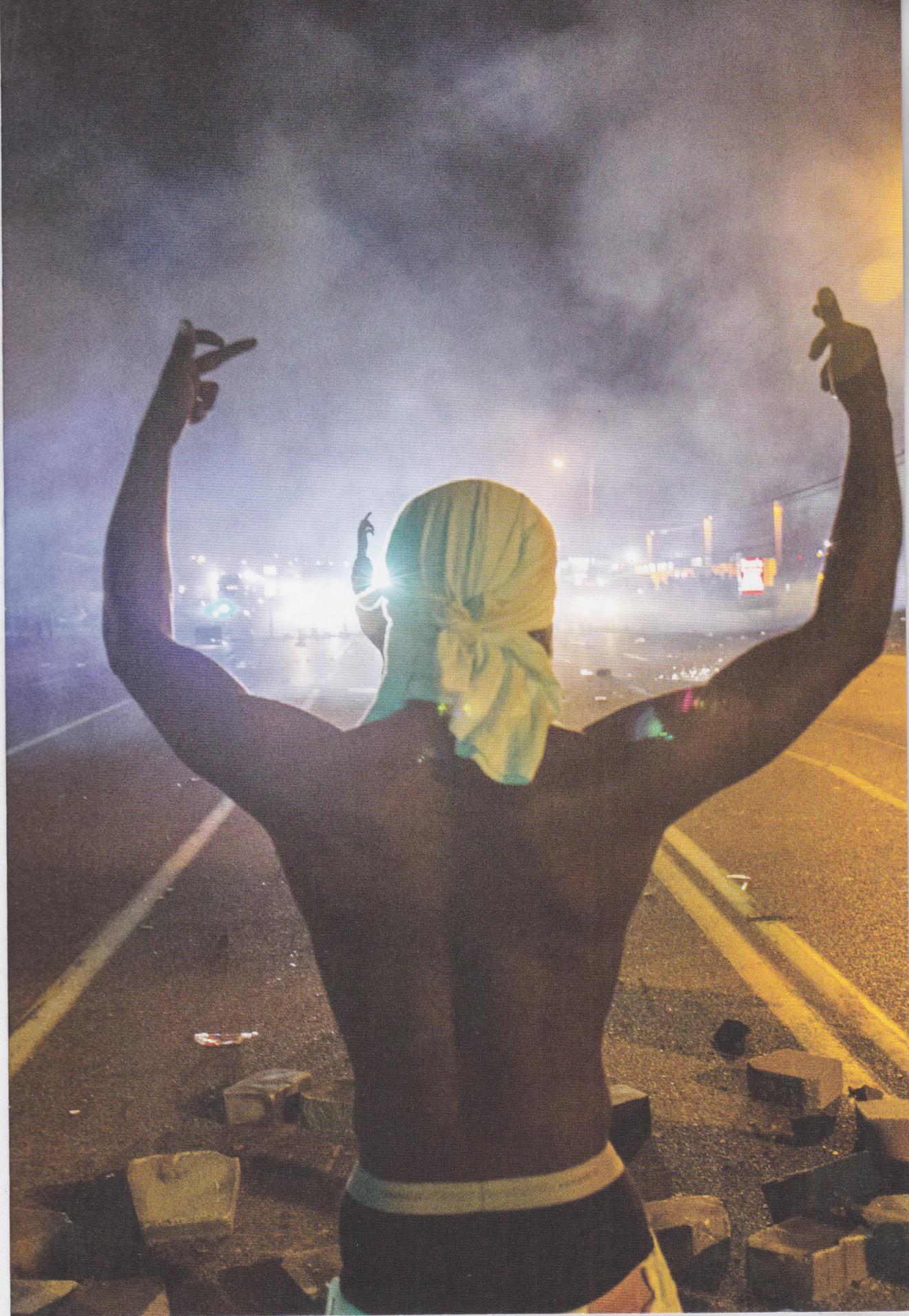
After Loukanikos passed away in October 2014, tributes appeared celebrating his legacy, including this comic by Greek artist Alex Markoulakis. He’s translated the title for us here as “The Road,” but in Greek, this word has the same associations as the expression “the streets” does in the US—where we rarely *hold the streets* against our enemies like our Greek comrades, human and otherwise.





"When they are asked to participate, they don't answer. They do not wish to be spoken to. Without looking round they keep walking. They appear to live in another universe. They're occupied with all kinds of things, but their purpose remains invisible through the media lens. They seem never to know what they want. But this dismissive attitude is not merely indifference. They are intently concentrating on the right thing; their silence stems from this. They only answer unasked questions. Their attention is focused on the approach of an event. And when the time comes, they are the ones who move into, **action** without hesitation."

—ADILKNO, *Cracking the Movement*



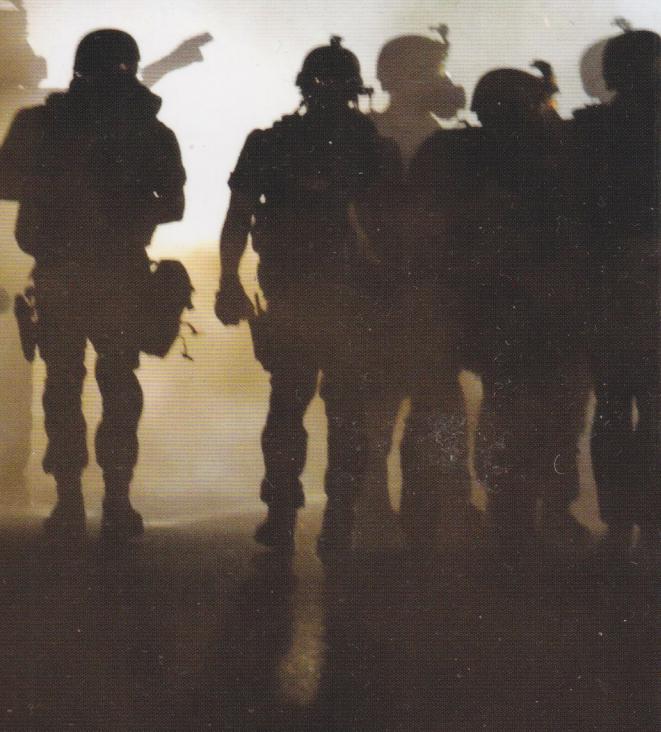
**“Those who make peaceful  
revolution impossible will make  
violent revolution inevitable.”**

– John F. Kennedy



ake peaceful  
sible will make  
on inevitable."

Kennedy



Issue #12 / Spring 2015

An Anarchist Journal  
Rolling Thunder Issue Number

confronting police & white supremacy from  
destroying surveillance cameras • resisting  
beyond the politics of demands • anarchist pe

The cover of Rolling Thunder journal, Issue #12, Spring 2015. The top half features a photograph of a police car with its front window shattered, with several people standing around it. The bottom half features a large, stylized white 'R' on a dark background, with the word 'THUNDER' partially visible below it. The journal's name is printed vertically on the left side. A small CrimethInc. logo is in the bottom left corner.